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THE KU KLUX KLAN  
ITS  
ORIGIN, GROWTH, AND DISBANDMENT

BY

ELMO PAUL HOHMAN

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THESIS

FOR THE

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

IN

HISTORY

---

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

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DEGREE OF Bachelor of Arts in History in

the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

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# THE KU KLUX KLAN: ITS ORIGIN, GROWTH, AND DISBANDMENT.

## CHAPTER I

### The Condition of the South at the Close of the Civil War.

It is the summer of 1865. The fires of fratricidal war, blazing fiercely and incessantly for four long and awful years, have at length burned themselves out, and only a bed of smouldering, blood-red embers remains to mark the spot of the terrible conflagration. For the first time in half a decade, the clang of the anvil and the sharpening of the ploughshare is heard above the roar of the cannon and the tread of marching troops. The musket has been exchanged for a plough, and the arts of peace have replaced the feverish activities of war. But all is not yet quiet and settled. To one who understands their flickerings and rapid alternations of light and shadow, the dying embers reveal a remarkable story of the sad and deplorable condition of the South at this time. They tell a tale of violence and corruption, of unrest and misunderstanding, of blighted hopes and bitter disappointments, of economic ruin and humiliating poverty, of insuperable tasks and perplexing problems, of ruined homes and abject misery, of stifled resentment and profound sorrow.

The South was beaten, thoroughly and hopelessly whipped. Of that there could be no doubt. And the great majority of the



thinking people of the South realized it, and accepted the situation.<sup>1</sup> Lee had surrendered to Grant at Appomattox only a short time before, in April, 1865. This was soon followed by the capitulation of Johnston to General Sherman, and the dispersion of the smaller bodies of Confederate troops. Thus by the summer of 1865 practically all the rebel troops, with the exception of a few isolated bands of guerrillas, had laid down their arms.<sup>2</sup> All attempts at organized resistance to the government had vanished. The backbone of the rebellion was broken, and broken very effectually, from a military viewpoint. The Southerners were forced into a full and complete realization of this fact, and so were constrained to acquiesce in the decree of Providence. They accepted the terms of defeat in regard to the abolition of slavery and the destruction of the right of secession; though they did not, quite naturally, at once give up a firm belief in the justice and correctness of their principles, but felt that a too-powerful conqueror had prevented them from putting those principles into practice.<sup>3</sup> In spite of a mixed feeling of animosity, resentment, and humiliation on the part of many people, the South realized that its only hope lay in accepting as fully and as completely as possible the terms and consequences of defeat, and so prepared, rather gloomily, to make the best of a situation that could not be bettered.

The leaders, especially, saw clearly that a complete acquiescence in the new condition of affairs was by far the most

1. Carl Schurz, Speeches, Correspondence, Pol. Papers, Vol. I, p. 284; Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Reconstruction, I, 51-66.
2. Rhodes, Hist. of U. S., V, 182.
3. Schurz, Speeches, Correspondence, Pol. Papers, I, 284-503.



feasible course to pursue. On May 29, 1865, President Johnson issued a proclamation of amnesty to all those who had participated in the rebellion, ( with certain important exceptions in the cases of high officers of the Confederacy or of the United States before the war ), who took the following oath of allegiance: "I,----, do solemnly swear (or affirm), in presence of Almighty God, that I will henceforth faithfully support, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States and the Union of States thereunder, and that I will in like manner abide by and faithfully support all laws and proclamations which have been made during the existing rebellion with reference to the emancipation of slaves. So help me God."<sup>1</sup> General Lee, in a series of letters written soon afterwards, advised all those who were eligible to take this oath and to accept the amnesty offered.<sup>2</sup> General Wade Hampton said in a letter to President Johnson, "The South accepts the situation. She intends to abide by the laws of the land honestly; to fulfill her obligations faithfully, and to keep her word sacredly."<sup>3</sup> And other leaders similarly expressed themselves in favor of a complete acquiescence in the new conditions.

But such conditions! The whole situation was one calculated to cause even the stoutest heart to quake with fear and foreboding. The economic position of the South, in particular, was appalling. The destruction of property during the war had been ruthless. The country in the Shenandoah Valley and the region in the wake of Sherman's march to the sea had been reduced to an absolute desert; and many other sections of the South were little

1. Richardson, Messages and Papers, VI, 310.
2. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., I, 63.
3. Ibid., I, 66.





better. An inhabitant of the Valley of Virginia thus describes the conditions there: "We had no cattle, hogs, sheep, or horses, or anything else. The fences were all gone; the barns were all burned; a great many of the private dwellings were burned; chimneys standing without houses, and houses standing without roof, or door, or window; bridges all destroyed, roads badly cut up; a most desolate state of affairs."<sup>1</sup> Many of the slave-holders had enjoyed magnificent incomes before the war; but most of their wealth was represented by the slaves, and a large portion of the plantation was often mortgaged. And now that their slaves were liberated, and much, if not all, of their property destroyed, they found themselves not only literally penniless, but heavily in debt.<sup>2</sup> Railroad property had been particularly subject to Federal ravages, and all the means of communication were seriously impaired. One well-equipped road, which had boasted of 49 locomotives, 37 passenger cars, and 550 freight cars just before the war, found itself in 1865 with 1 locomotive, 2 passenger cars, and 4 freight cars.<sup>3</sup> The Confederate currency, which was the only form of money possessed by the Southerners, was worse than worthless. Even the crops were a disappointment; for "it is estimated that only one-half a crop will be made this season."<sup>4</sup>

Destitution, want, and poverty reigned supreme. A description of conditions in the summer of 1865 reads like a tale of a famine in India. Absolutely everything, in many cases, was gone. An official of the Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama says in a

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., I, 11.
2. Ibid, I, 16.
3. Ibid, I, 18.
4. Ibid, I, 23.



report: "Women and children and broken down men came 30 and 40 miles to beg a little food. Some are without homes of any description. On one road leading to Talladega I visited four families who were living in the woods, with no shelter but pine boughs."<sup>1</sup> The Federal Government, through the Freedmen's Bureau, issued large quantities of provisions to these destitute people. It was said that there were 35,000 men, women, and children in the counties of Georgia, immediately surrounding Atlanta, who were dependent upon the Government for preservation by death from hunger.<sup>2</sup> A singular commentary on the irony of war is furnished by the record of one proud and wealthy old South Carolina family whose members were exterminated during the conflict, with the single exception of one old man, who was reduced to the miserable expedient of peddling tea by the pound and molasses by the quart, on a corner of the old homestead, to the former slaves of the family, in order to earn a livelihood.<sup>3</sup> Even the best families subsisted mostly on corn-bread, and were often forced to eat a coarse cattle fodder known as "cow-peas."<sup>4</sup> Gone were the silks and satins of the ante-bellum days, and the women of the South appeared uniformly in the coarsest of home-spun dresses. The living conditions are thus described by a general in the Federal Army: "Everything has been mended, and generally in the rudest style. Window-glass has given way to thin boards. Furniture is marred and broken. Dishes are cemented in various styles, and half of the pitchers have tin handles. A complete set of crockery is never

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., I, 20.

2. Ibid, I, 22.

3. Ibid, I, 17.

4. Ibid, I, 15.



seen....A set of forks with whole tines is a curiosity. Clocks and watches have all worn out; pins, needles, and thread,...are very scarce. Few have pocket knives. At the tables you will find neither tea, coffee, sugar, nor spices of any kind. Even candles have been replaced, in some cases, by a cup of grease, in which a piece of cloth is plunged for a wick."<sup>1</sup>

And as if these miseries were not enough, the people were subjected to graft and frauds of all kinds, mostly by Northern agents. The cotton confiscation frauds were especially notorious. General Sanby issued a military order requiring all persons who had sold cotton to the Confederate States to surrender it to the Federal authorities, under pain of having their property confiscated if they failed to do so. Immediately the country was filled with impostors who claimed to be Treasury agents, and who, often under the protection of a detachment of Federal soldiers, seized large quantities of cotton which were never turned over to the government.<sup>2</sup> The agents of the Freedmen's Bureau, in some cases, were also guilty of speculation and fraud in connection with the supplies advanced by the Government. In addition, many sections of the country were still infested by bands of guerrillas, composed mostly of thieves and robbers who maintained a semblance of order and discipline within their own ranks.

And besides all these economic distractions, there was the negro problem, which loomed large in the foreground. Quite naturally, the first taste of freedom led to excesses. There was much vagrancy and refusal to work, and a certain amount of violence.

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., I, 11.

2. Ibid, I, p. 25.



There was an idea prevalent amongst the negroes that the government would divide the land of their former owners among them, giving each family "forty acres and a mule."<sup>1</sup> Many of them left the plantations, and wandered about the country in bands of twenty or fifty. The whites were afraid of a negro uprising, and the various state legislatures passed the so-called Black Codes, calculated to restrain the negroes and keep them in what the whites regarded as their proper level.<sup>2</sup> Many of the negroes, however, simply remained quietly on their plantations, and continued with their work as usual. Many others, disappointed with the wanderings of freedom, returned to their plantations and resumed work. Thus, on August 15, 1865, nine hundred negroes assembled near Mobile passed a resolution declaring that their present status of freedom was worse than the old condition, and voted to return to their masters and to resume work.<sup>3</sup> On the whole, it does not appear that the former slave-holders felt any particular hatred against the blacks, but simply wished to help them to be as quiet and as contented as possible without changing their social position.

Such, then, were the conditions which the returning Confederate soldier faced upon returning to his home in the early summer of 1865. Henry W. Grady, in his oration, "The New South", describes the situation admirably and eloquently in the following words: "He (the Confederate soldier) finds his house in ruins, his farm devastated, his slaves free, his stock killed, his barns

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., I, 350.
2. Sinclair, Aftermath of Slavery, 62-68.
3. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., I, 90.





empty, his trade destroyed, his money worthless; his social system, feudal in its magnificence, swept away; his people without law or legal status, his comrades slain, and the burdens of others heavy on his shoulders. Crushed by defeat, his very traditions are gone; without money, credit, employment, material or training; and besides all this, confronted with the gravest problem that ever met human intelligence, -- the establishing of a status for the vast body of his liberated slaves."<sup>1</sup>

1. H. W. Grady, *The New South*, in *Modern Eloquence*, VIII, 583.



## CHAPTER II

## Reconstruction Under the Congressional Policy

Beyond doubt a large share of the blame and discredit for the unfortunate conditions existing in the South during the reconstruction period must be laid at the door of the Congressional policy of reconstruction. Not that under any other plan, even that of Lincoln, everything would have progressed smoothly and happily, for there were discordant elements in the situation which could not have been reconciled without a certain amount of strife and disorder; but in all probability conditions would not have become so acute, and the wounds of the war would have been healed much sooner, under a less harsh and more sympathetic system of governmental supervision. In opposition to the mild, sympathetic policy begun by Lincoln and continued as far as possible by his successor, President Johnson, who believed that the Southern States had never really been out of the Union, and who therefore desired to see them regain their ante-bellum status as quickly and as quietly as possible,<sup>1</sup> the Congressional leaders, headed by Thaddeus Stevens, became convinced that the defeated Confederate States were insidiously attempting to reenslave the negroes in everything except the mere name, that they had deliberately broken off all relations with the Federal Government and were now in a position strictly analogous to a number of conquered foreign provinces, that the power of readmitting them to their former position rested in Congress alone, and that before such readmittance

1. McCarthy, Lincoln's Plan of Reconstruction, 190ff.



could take place strict and elaborate guarantees of their loyalty to the Union and of their future good behavior must be required.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, these leaders procured the passage of the three so-called Reconstruction Acts. The first of these, passed on March 2, 1867, divided the South into a number of military districts, each district to be presided over by a military officer with supreme authority. It also provided that the rebel states were to obtain representation in Congress only after having formed a constitution in conformity with that of the United States, to be framed by a convention of delegates composed of male citizens twenty-one years of age or older, of all races, colors, and previous conditions, except such as were disfranchised by participation in the rebellion, and to be approved by Congress. The State Legislatures elected under such a constitution must also approve the fourteenth amendment.<sup>2</sup> The second act, of March 23, 1867, provided that the registration and voting outlined in the first act should be entirely under the direction of the military governor of each district, and laid down certain stringent rules of eligibility, to the effect that no person who had ever held any legislative, executive, or judicial office in any State of the Union, and had subsequently engaged in insurrection, should be eligible either to register or to vote.<sup>3</sup> The third act, of July 19, 1867, declared the existing state governments in the Southern States to be illegal, and gave the military commanders power to remove any state officer if they saw fit. The registration boards

1. Hart, American Hist. Told by Contemporaries, IV, 471-475.
2. MacDonald, Select Statutes of U. S. History, 1861-1898, 158.
3. McPherson, Political Manual for 1866-1867, 192.



were also to have full power to challenge anyone who attempted to register.<sup>1</sup> Such, in brief, are the salient measures of the Congressional policy of reconstruction.

Much dissatisfaction was caused throughout the South by the enfranchisement of the negroes and the accompanying disfranchisement of a large proportion of the leading white men. Section three of the fourteenth amendment provided that "no person shall hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any State Legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid and comfort to the enemies thereof."<sup>2</sup> As a consequence of this clause, the respectable white vote of the South was very materially weakened just when it was needed most. Just how serious this weakening was may be seen from the fact that out of a total white vote of 115,000 in Alabama, 30,000 were disqualified.<sup>3</sup>

And now we come to that phase of the reconstruction movement which was at once the most characteristic and the most disgraceful. This was the reign of the carpet-bagger, the scalawag, and the negro, popularly known as the Black and Tan Governments. The term carpet-bagger was used to designate a certain type of unscrupulous Northern adventurer who employed the

1. McPherson, History of Reconstruction, 335.
2. MacDonald, Select Statutes of U. S. History, 1861-1898, 209.
3. Ku Klux Reports, Ala. Test., 911.





ignorance and superstition of the negro and the generally disturbed conditions as the means for his own political preferment and personal aggrandizement; while the word scalawag denoted a native Southerner who sympathized with the Unionists, and who served as an able ally of the carpet-bagger in the work of graft and corruption. A certain number of negro leaders completed a political ring whose domination of Southern politics was for a time practically absolute. The amount and character of political corruption is almost unbelievable. Governor Warmoth of Louisiana served for four years at an annual salary of \$8000; yet he himself testified that he saved more than \$100,000 during the first year.<sup>1</sup> The Republicans nominated for mayor of Vicksburg a man who was under indictment for twenty-three offenses, and for aldermen, seven negroes and one white man, none of whom could read or write.<sup>2</sup> It was in South Carolina, however, that the orgy of corruption reached its height. Here for awhile the members of the Legislature charged practically all of their personal expenses to the legislative contingent fund. Personal bills were simply sent to the proper officer of the Legislature, who paid them, and returned the receipted bills to the members.<sup>3</sup> A Mr. Woodruff, the clerk of the Senate at this time, said, "Under the head of supplies was embraced anything a Senator chose to order."<sup>4</sup> This statement may be more thoroughly appreciated when we examine the report of an investigating committee a few years later, which gives the following partial list of articles bought by the legislators and paid

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 39.

2. Ibid, II, 43.

3. Ibid, II, 60.

4. Ibid, II, 61.



for by the State under the head of "State House Supplies: 38 varieties of wines and liquors; 71 items under groceries and delicacies, from parlor matches to vinegar and Westphalia hams; 68 kinds of furniture, from feather beds to coffins; 88 kinds of furnishings, from Brussels carpets to buttons and hooks and eyes; 25 varieties of womens' wearing apparel; 58 kinds of jewelry, from tape measures to a 64 light chandelier; 35 items under printing matter; 21 kinds of crockery and glassware; and 41 items under sundries, from cork-screws to egg coal.<sup>1</sup>

A large majority of the members of various legislative bodies were negroes, usually former slaves who could neither read nor write. Bribery was everywhere rampant, and it was said to be absolutely impossible to get an ordinary bill through the South Carolina Legislature without the liberal use of money.<sup>2</sup> An amusing story is told of an old negro state senator, who, while counting a large roll of greenbacks, remarked to a friend, "I'se been sold many times befo', but dis is de fust time I ebber got de money myself."

The administration of justice was often hardly more than a farce. In North Carolina and Mississippi many negro justices of the peace were appointed who could neither read nor write, who were absolutely ignorant of the law, and who simply "made their marks" in signing official documents.<sup>3</sup> Practically all the judges trafficked in bribery. This loose and biased administration of the law gave rise to many excesses. Murders were frequent, and

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 62.

2. Ibid, II, 55.

3. Ibid, II, 43.



violence, intimidation, rape, incendiarism, theft, and general destruction of property caused a reign of absolute terrorism.<sup>1</sup> The officials were either incompetent or impartial. The colored troops, in particular, committed many crimes, and assumed a general air of haughty superiority which was unbearable to the whites.<sup>2</sup> Women and children were afraid to venture away from home, even during the day time, for fear of being insulted.<sup>3</sup> The behavior of the majority of the negroes, though bad enough, was not so vicious as might have been expected under the circumstances. They would probably have remained fairly quiet, had they not been goaded on by the teachings of the carpet-baggers, advocating complete social, political, and racial equality and urging them to seek revenge for the long years of slavery. The slightest offense of a Southern white led to arrest and imprisonment, while the carpet-baggers, scalawags, and negroes were allowed to go unpunished even for the most flagrant offenses.<sup>4</sup> The elections were a burlesque on democratic government. Besides those who were lawfully disfranchised, many of the democrats were refused permission to vote because of some imaginary technicality, and in some cases were forcibly kept away from the ballot box by a guard of negro troops.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, large numbers of ignorant negroes were brought to the polls and often instructed to vote several times.<sup>6</sup> Under such a system, it is not surprising that tremendous Republican majorities were constantly being returned.

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 75.

2. Ibid, II, 77.

3. Ibid, II, 333.

4. Ibid, II, 49.

5. Ibid, II, 81.

6. Ibid, II, 81.



One of the most important agencies in maintaining the power of the carpet-bag governments was the Union League, or, as it was sometimes called, the Loyal League. This was an organization founded in the North in 1862 in order to consolidate Union sentiment.<sup>1</sup> It soon spread into the South, including in its membership both negroes and white Union sympathizers. The negroes, however, soon gained control of the order. As a result of this fact, large numbers of whites began to leave the society, until by the time reconstruction was well under way the membership was predominantly black, with unscrupulous carpet-bag and scalawag leaders.<sup>2</sup> Here was an ideal instrument for attaining the political domination which the latter so much desired. The negroes were ignorant, superstitious, guileless, trusting, and unsophisticated, easily led, and easily inflamed. Night meetings, secret and mysterious, parades, inflammatory speeches, often inviting the members to crime and violence, threats of returning slavery, grotesque and mystifying initiation ceremonies, a bombastic, magniloquent ritual, with terrifying promises of eternal secrecy, - all these devices served to keep the blacks in unquestioning obedience to the orders of the leaders.<sup>3</sup> The strictest discipline was enforced, the members being compelled to vote the Radical or Republican ticket. Many cases are recorded of negroes who were dragged from their homes at night and severely whipped for voting the Democratic ticket.<sup>4</sup> A great many lawless acts, including

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 3.

2. Dunning, Reconstruction, Political and Economic, Amer. Hist. Series, XXII, 115.

3. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 4.

4. Ibid, 27.





especially barn burnings, whippings, and robberies, were committed by order of the Union League in an effort to intimidate the white democratic voters into staying away from the polls.<sup>1</sup> The black republican voters, on the other hand, were taught, and in many cases actually forced to cast their votes with a machine-like precision which would have been at once the envy and despair of Tammany Hall. In some cases they "marched to the polls by battalions, armed with muskets and stepping to the beat of drums. They stacked their arms around the polls, some standing guard."<sup>2</sup> Beside the Union League, there were immediately after the war several smaller organizations very similar in their methods and purposes. Chief among these were the Lincoln Brotherhood and the Heroes of America or the Red Strings. These were of only minor importance, however, and soon became merged with the forces of the Union League.<sup>3</sup>

Another organization which exerted a strong influence in determining the trend of reconstruction was the Freedmen's Bureau. This was established by an act of Congress of March 3, 1865, for the "supervision and management of all abandoned lands and the control of all subjects relating to refugees and freedmen."<sup>4</sup> The purposes and objects of the organizations were good, and it accomplished the alleviation of much suffering and the amelioration of many deplorable conditions. Through it the Secretary of War issued rations, clothing, and fuel to the helpless and unemployed negroes; and by means of it certain abandoned or confiscated lands

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 22.

2. Ibid, II, 25.

3. Ibid, II, 20.

4. Phelps, Louisiana, 337.



were leased or sold at nominal prices to the ex-slaves in tracts of forty acres each. The bureau also established schools and churches regulated labor and contracts, and provided for the administration of justice in cases in which the blacks were concerned.<sup>1</sup> But the lower officials of the Bureau, the men who came directly into contact with the negroes, were in most cases incapable and shrewdly unscrupulous. In far too many cases they resorted to the same methods employed by the Union League, inciting the negroes to hatred and violence against their former masters, encouraging vagrancy and idleness and organizing the blacks to further their own political ends. In fact, in many cases the personnel of the Bureau and the League was the same.<sup>2</sup> They circulated reports amongst the freedmen that the government would redistribute all the lands of the South, dispossessing the former slave holders and giving each ex-slave "forty acres and a mule;" and for a long time this expression was the rallying cry of the negroes.<sup>3</sup> A tremendous amount of graft and speculation took place, chiefly through the cotton confiscation frauds, and by means of selling for private gain the supplies advanced by the government.<sup>4</sup> The Freedmens' Savings and Trust Company, conducted mainly by the officials of the Bureau, soon degenerated into a monstrous swindle, and the depositors, mostly negroes of small means, lost practically everything they had entrusted to it.<sup>5</sup> On the whole, it cannot be said that the Freedmens' Bureau was wholly good or wholly bad; but certainly the bad far outweighed the good.

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 315.

2. Ibid, I, 317.

3. Phelps, Louisiana, 340.

4. Herbert, Why the Solid South, 17.

5. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., I, 382-393.



Such, then were the conditions existing in the South under the Congressional policy of reconstruction. Small wonder, indeed, that they led to secret resistance under the guise of the Ku Klux Klan. The marvel is rather that they did not bring about a bloodier and more violent form of recrimination and resistance.



## CHAPTER III

## The Causes of the Ku Klux Movement.

The causes of the Ku Klux movement are to be found in the generally disturbed, unstable, and chaotic conditions of the times, as described in the preceding pages. "The Ku Klux Klan was the outgrowth of the peculiar social, civil, and political conditions in the South from 1865 to 1869. It was as much a product of those conditions as malaria is of a swamp and sun-heat."<sup>1</sup> The general situation of chaos and disorder, then, as fostered and exaggerated by the Congressional policy of reconstruction, may be taken as the broad, fundamental cause of the movement. A radical social revolution was taking place; everything was in a state of flux. An old order of affairs, embodying the customs, traditions, and institutions of centuries, was being forced to give way to a new order whose constituent elements were not yet clearly defined. And quite naturally an extended period of confused readjustment was unavoidable.

But there were certain particular phases or elements of this situation which stood out prominently and distinctly, like a man of ordinary height towers above a group of children. Chief among these, perhaps, was the Loyal League. Time and again the statement is made in the bulky testimony of the Ku Klux Reports, as well as in other sources, that the Ku Klux Klan was formed to

1. Wilson, Ku Klux Klan, in Century Magazine, VI, 399.





counteract the objectionable practices of the League.<sup>1</sup> The Southerners were driven to fight fire with fire. Another element was the feeling engendered amongst the whites that the Federal Government was violating the terms of the paroles given to the Confederate soldiers at Appomattox. These paroles stated that they were not to be disturbed as long as they were law-abiding; yet the Government not only allowed individuals to be punished for alleged crimes without trial, not only did it countenance a political tyranny all the more galling because exercised by persons despised as social and intellectual inferiors, but in the form of the reconstruction acts it punished a whole people by legislative enactment, which was contrary to the whole spirit of American institutions.<sup>2</sup> As General Clanton complained, the Southern people had passed out of the hands of warriors into the hands of squaws.<sup>3</sup> The machinations of the Freedmen's Bureau, preaching social and political equality of the races, confiscation and division of lands, and countenancing idleness, violence, and corruption, formed another source of unrest. Still another bitter yoke for the proud and sensitive spirit of the Southerners was the political enfranchisement of the ignorant and superstitious blacks and the corresponding disfranchisement of the capable and intellectual whites. This led directly to the corrupt and tyrannical rule of the alien carpet-bagger, the renegade scalawag, and the despised negro, forming a great triumvirate of misrule, graft and

1. Ku Klux Reports, Ala. Test., 783;  
Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 331.
2. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 655;  
Ku Klux Reports, Ala. Test., 381.
3. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 656

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14. Thank you for your attention and cooperation.

violence.

Besides these more prominent causes of unrest and discontent, there were the humiliations and irritations of actual physical mistreatment; the farcical administration of justice; the difficulties of obtaining a redress of grievances; the gloating excesses of the negro militia, expensively armed and gaily clad;<sup>1</sup> the corresponding disarming of the white militia companies; the repetition of negro votes at the ballot boxes, the withdrawal of the right of challenge, and the countless forms of petty political trickery and chicanery; the senseless extravagance of the negro legislatures, piling up enormous debts and multiplying the tax-rates many-fold;<sup>2</sup> the financial ruin and the humiliating poverty; the numerous outrages on white women by black men; the boisterous, insolent behavior of the idle and drunken negroes; the homicides, murders, barn-burnings, horse-stealings, robberies, and crimes of all descriptions; the depredations of roving bands of Confederate deserters, bushwhackers, guerrillas, horse-thieves, and outlaws of every description;<sup>3</sup> the powerlessness or refusal of the local governments to enforce the law; and the harassed and nerve-racking feeling of living in perpetual disquietude and insecurity, -- all these factors combined to form a situation of social, political, and economic chaos and anarchy. It was inevitable that a people as proud and as liberty-loving as the Southerners should be driven to some form of rebellion and resistance against such anarchical conditions. That this resistance took the particular shape of

1. Brown, Lower South in Amer. Hist., 197.

2. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 71.

3. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 654.



Ku-Kluxism was probably accidental; and yet this was by far the most effective method which could have been devised. Certainly any open, armed rebellion would have been well-nigh impossible, and would have been remorselessly crushed if it had been attempted. And effective political revolt was impossible, owing to the disparity of numbers. Therefore, they chose the secret method of the midnight conclave, playing upon the superstition of the negroes, and their awful dread of the supernatural, -- and they achieved results, remarkable results. Certainly the methods of Ku-Kluxism are not to be entirely commended; and yet we cannot deny either the efficacy of the treatment or the desirability of many of the results.

Such, then, are the causes, general and specific, of the Ku Klux movement. It was not the work of any one man, or the idea of any one brain. Instead, it was an important historical development, a perfectly natural and logical outcome of the conditions which prevailed at its birth. Editor Myland Randolph said in the Tuscaloosa, Alabama, "Independent Monitor", of April 14, 1868: "The origin of Ku Klux Klan is in the galling despotism that broods like a nightmare over these southern states, -- a fungus growth of military tyranny superinduced by the fostering of Loyal Leagues, the abrogation of our civil laws, the habitual violation of our national constitution, and a persistent prostitution of all government, all resources, and all powers to degrade the white man by the establishment of negro supremacy."<sup>1</sup> And though coming from a partisan leader in the heat of conflicts, this statement is not to

1. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 657.



be too heavily discounted.





## CHAPTER IV

## Precursors of the Klan

The organization and existence of a society such as the Ku Klux Klan was not altogether without precedent. In fact, there had been quite a number of semi-secret local bands of regulators, varying greatly in methods, membership, and purposes, both before and immediately after the war. The most important of these was the old ante-bellum neighborhood police patrol. Under this system, the justice of the peace appointed a certain number of white men to patrol the whole community once a week or once a month, usually at night.<sup>1</sup> These men, operating usually in companies of six privates and a captain, possessed the authority to inflict summary corporal punishment for any kind of a misdemeanor. Their power was not restricted to negroes alone, but extended also to white men in many cases; and every able-bodied white was subject to service, which was compulsory.<sup>2</sup> The negroes were abjectly afraid of these patrols, which were known to them as the "patterrollers." William Garrott Brown, in his delightful book, "The Lower South in American History", tells of hearing the old negroes relate terrifying stories of "de patterrollers", liberally interspersed with the jingling refrain:-<sup>3</sup>

"Run, nigger, run!  
De patterrollers ketch you!"

But after the war such a patrol system was illegal, and the

1. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 657.

2. *Ibid.*, 658.

3. Brown, Lower South in Amer. Hist., 193.



whites were forced to resort to other more secret methods. In many communities vigilance committees, consisting mostly of young men, were formed, and all cases of misdemeanor on the part of the negroes were reported to the committee. The offenders were then visited at night, and their unnatural "nigger pride", as the whites termed it, taken down a few notches.<sup>1</sup> In one county in the Black Belt of Alabama in which most of the white men had been killed in the war, the small but determined vigilance committee used a system of signals by means of plantation bells.<sup>2</sup> In other counties in which the fear of negro insurrection became acute, the whites formed secret militia companies which sought to intimidate and to disarm the blacks as far as possible.

Besides these rather loosely organized bands, there existed also in many parts of the South various secret, oath-bound, night-riding societies of avowed regulators. The best-known of these societies was the Black-Horse Cavalry, whose greatest strength lay in the north-eastern counties of Alabama.<sup>3</sup> Other similar organizations were the Men of Justice, the Order of Peace, the Regulators, the Jay-hawkers, and many other purely local orders, some of which were not even dignified by possessing names or officers;<sup>4</sup> but all were alike in attempting to intimidate the negroes and to reassert the superiority of the whites. Thus it will be seen that the Ku Klux Klan did not come as an entirely

1. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 658.

2. Ibid, 658.

3. Ibid, 660;

Ku Klux Reports Ala. Test. 1125, 1136.

4. Ku Klux Reports, Ala. Test., 877, 664;  
Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 360.



unfamiliar and novel departure, but rather as a highly improved and more effective application of methods which were already vaguely known.



## CHAPTER V

## The First Den

We come now to the actual organization of the first den of the Klan, to the humble origin of this far-famed society. And the thing that impresses a casual reader most about this phase of the order is the perfectly natural, everyday, almost commonplace manner of its beginning. Where he expected to find insoluble mysteries, diabolical orgies, and terrifying rites conducted by demons of the underworld, he discovers only the most sane and rational of mere mortals engaged in that highly prosaic and universal occupation of seeking a bit of pleasure in their spare hours. Six young men have joined together in an attempt to wile away an excess of leisure time, to escape from the monotonous sameness of ennui. What more natural, more commonplace, more to be expected, than this? And yet this insignificant scheme for mere amusement was destined to grow into a powerful order commanding the absolute adherence of hundreds of thousands of men, and exerting a profound influence upon the subsequent course of American history!

For a period of several years after the close of the war all the ordinary amenities of social life in the South were paralyzed. Dancing, visiting, concerts, theatre performances, athletic sports, even trade and industry, -- all the things which tend to bring people into social contact, -- were at a standstill.<sup>1</sup> This

1. Brown, Lower South in Amer. Hist., 199.





was particularly true of the little village of Pulaski, Tennessee. Early in 1866 there were living in this town a number of young men who had worn the Confederate uniform throughout the Civil War; and to red-blooded fellows who had fought above the clouds on Lookout Mountain or had seen Pickett's charge at Gettysburg, the situation was especially irksome. One evening during the latter part of May, 1866, several of them met in the law office of T. M. Jones.<sup>1</sup> The conversation soon turned upon the absolute dearth of amusements in the town, and someone exclaimed, "Let's organize a club of some kind." The suggestion met with instant and enthusiastic approval; and it was decided to acquaint one or two others with the proposal, and to meet again the following evening for the purpose of organization. At this second meeting six young men were present, -- Captain J. C. Lester, Major J. R. Crowe, John Kennedy, Calvin Jones, R. R. Reed, and Frank O. McCord, all of whom possessed highly estimable characters and represented some of the best families of the community.<sup>2</sup> It was unanimously agreed that the purposes of the club should be simply those of amusement and diversion, to be obtained mainly through the horse-play connected with the initiation of new members and by means of mystifying and baffling the curiosity of the public. A chairman and a secretary were elected, and two committees appointed, one to select a name, and the other to draw up a set of rules for the government of the society and to prepare a ritual for the initiation of new members.<sup>5</sup>

At a subsequent meeting held several days later the

1. Lester and Wilson, *The Ku Klux Klan*, 53.

2. *Ibid.*, 19.

3. *Ibid.*, 54.



committee on the selection of a name reported that it had been unable to reach any definite conclusion in regard to the matter. However, several cognomens were suggested, among which was the Greek word Kuklos, meaning circle. After a lengthy discussion, someone exclaimed, "Let's make it Ku Klux"; and from this to Ku Klux Klan was an easy and natural step.<sup>1</sup> This name was enthusiastically accepted. It was euphonious, alliterative, mysterious, and, best of all, absolutely meaningless, admirably calculated to excite curiosity and to baffle investigation. And so the little club was officially styled the Ku Klux Klan. At the same meeting the committee on rules submitted a report providing for a set of officers to consist of a Grand Cyclops, or President; a Grand Magi, or Vice-President; a Grand Turk, or Marshal; a Grand Exchequer, or Treasurer; and two Lictors, or Sergeants-at-Arms.<sup>2</sup> The most important feature of the rules consisted of an obligation binding on all members to take an oath of absolute secrecy concerning all things pertaining to the organization, to tell no one of the order, to divulge the name of no member, and not to solicit any new members.<sup>3</sup> This last clause displays a shrewd knowledge of human nature. In reality they wanted new members badly, in fact, they were an absolute sine qua non of the organization, for most of their diversion was to come from the initiation of neophytes; but they knew that the surest way in which to attract prospective members was to appear indifferent and exclusive. Hence the rule. A highly grotesque and elaborately mysterious initiation

1. Wilson, Ku Klux Klan, in Century Mag., VI, 399.

2. Lester, and Wilson, LKK, 57.

3. Ibid, 57.



ritual was also drawn up in manuscript form; but the original manuscript was destroyed after the disbandment of the Klan in 1869, and as no copies were ever allowed to be made, only a few scattered oral accounts of it have come down to us.<sup>1</sup> Each member was required to provide himself with the following outfit, to be worn only at the initiation ceremony: a white face mask, with holes for the eyes and nose; a tall, fantastic cardboard hat; a gown or robe of sufficient length to cover the whole person, belted at the waist, and usually made of an ordinary white sheet or a piece of "Dolly Varden" calico, though no particular color or material was prescribed; and a small whistle for communication by means of a code.<sup>2</sup>

For several weeks the meetings of the Klan continued to be held in the law office of Mr. Jones. Then a Mr. Thomas Martin, one of the leading citizens of Pulaski, was forced to go to Columbus, Mississippi, on an extended business trip, and decided to have his family accompany him.<sup>3</sup> He invited one of the members of the society to sleep at his home during his absence; and this quasi-watchman made bold to hold the meetings of the Klan there during the greater part of the summer.<sup>4</sup> However, both of these places were situated in the main part of the town, where the activities of the initiators were naturally somewhat restricted. But finally an ideal spot was found. On the extreme outskirts of the little village stood the lonely, forsaken remains of a once-

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 57.

2. Ibid, 59.

3. Ibid, 54.

4. Ibid, 54.



pretentious mansion which had been partially destroyed by a cyclone some years previous to the war. Only one single room, which had formerly formed a portion of a wing of the building, still remained habitable, together with a large and spacious cellar partially filled with the debris from the demolished part of the structure. Several large pillars, the last remnants of an old portico, together with a number of gaunt tree-trunks whose limbs had been lopped off by the storm, stood out above the horizon like grim and watchful sentinels; while a quantity of high grass, weeds, and underbrush partially hid the demolished structure from view. Altogether, it was a lonesome, dreary place, seldom visited; for many people insisted that it was haunted. However, it was admirably suited to the purposes of the Klansmen; and this they soon made their regular meeting place.<sup>1</sup>

And now let us describe one of the initiation ceremonies, which so far formed the main feature of the organization. When a desirable prospective member had been agreed upon, one of the founders, in pursuance of the policy of non-solicitation, would himself express to the outsider a desire to join the order. If the prospective candidate concurred in this wish, the member would say that he thought he knew of a way of getting in, and would then suggest that they meet on a certain night at a designated spot and attempt to join together.<sup>2</sup> The specified time and place invariably found the neophyte waiting, and the member would immediately lead him up to the First Lictor, who was stationed fifty yards

1. Wilson, KKK, Cent. Mag., VI, 401.

2. Ibid, 401.





from the house on one of the roads leading into the town.<sup>1</sup> This functionary was fantastically garbed and armed with a tremendous spear, and presented a truly terrifying appearance. The Second Lictor, stationed at the house, was then summoned by a blast of the whistle. After blindfolding the neophyte and turning him around rapidly several times in order to confuse his sense of direction, the Second Lictor would lead him up to the abandoned house by a circuitous route, taking great care that he should strike all the most awkward obstructions in the path.<sup>2</sup> Finally he was led down into the cellar, where the other Klansmen were quietly assembled in full initiatory regalia, and where other artificial stumbling-blocks were encountered, and placed before the Grand Cyclops. This dignitary immediately began to ply the novitiate with questions, partly serious, but mostly very absurd, and calculated to increase the discomfiture of the latter.<sup>3</sup> After obtaining satisfactory answers to all his questions, the Grand Cyclops would finally say, "Place him before the royal altar and adorn his head with the regal crown."<sup>4</sup> The neophyte was then stationed before a looking glass and a huge hat with two enormous donkey ears placed upon his head, after which he was commanded to repeat those well-known lines of Robert Burns:

"O wad some power the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as ithers see us."

In ready compliance with this involuntary request, the Grand Turk

1. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 60.
2. *Ibid.*, 62.
3. *Ibid.*, 63.
4. *Ibid.*, 64.



now expeditiously removed the hoodwinks, and the victim's chagrin and humiliation at his unhappy plight were further increased by the uproarious laughter and the shouts of mock derision from the grotesquely disguised members.<sup>1</sup> After the merrymaking had subsided, the purposes, rules, and nature of the organization were explained to the candidate, he was allowed to take the oath, and was then declared to be a full-fledged Klansman.<sup>2</sup> A hearty welcome from his fellow members, who had now removed their disguises, and a plain but substantial repast, soon removed all thoughts of the discomfitures of the early part of the evening.

Such was the simple origin of the Ku Klux Klan, an organization which in the course of a few years was probably accused of being directly responsible for more crime, violence, and bloodshed than any other in American history. And it must be admitted that much of this opprobrium was partially deserved, though a very large share of the violence with which the society was charged took place only in the pages of partisan journals or in the imaginations of excitable abolitionists. But during these early months of its infancy the Klan was thoroughly peaceful and law-abiding in both purpose and method, and attempted nothing more violent than a slight physical discomfiture of its initiates. The story of its transformation from such a purely fun-producing club of a rather happy-go-lucky type to a band of determined regulators who often stooped to violence and sometimes to crime is one of intense in-

1. Wilson, KKK, Cent. Mag., VI, 401.
2. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 64.
3. Ibid, 64.



terest, and is entirely and logically traceable to the highly anomalous conditions of the times.



## CHAPTER VI

## The Early Character and Spread of the Movement.

As brought out in the preceding description of the original Pulaski den, the character and purposes of the society at this early period were wholly peaceful and mirth-provoking. Its members regarded the organization only as a means of rendering more endurable the ennui attendant upon life in a small town entirely devoid of social amusements. There was no thought of posing as a band of regulators or of attempting to remedy any of the current evils existent in the society of that day. In fact, most of the members would probably have been vastly amused at the mere suggestion that their little club might really serve any serious purpose. A large amount of mystery and a certain degree of mock solemnity were employed because they added greatly to the enjoyment of the meetings. But throughout these first months the central idea was always that of securing a somewhat boisterous, but thoroughly harmless, form of enjoyment, and the watchword was simply, Amusement and Diversion! The Klan at this stage of its existence resembled nothing so much as a certain type of modern college fraternity whose chief raison d'etre seems to be the elaborate initiation of new members. The practices of such a fraternity are not particularly aesthetic or uplifting, perhaps; and certainly no one ever suspected it of harboring any really serious purpose. But still it is essentially harmless, except in a purely





negative way, and hardly worth the trouble and attention necessary to abolish it. Such an organization, in many respects, was the Ku Klux Klan at this early period. But there was this highly important difference; the absolute dearth of any other form of amusement in the Pulaski of that day gave the early members of the Klan a thoroughly justifiable and sufficient reason for its existence; while it certainly cannot be said that the college youth of today is undergoing a process of stagnation because of a lack of diversions.

Great care was taken in selecting the members of this first den, and only young men of recognized standing in the community and of high moral character were admitted.<sup>1</sup> Curiously enough, the six original founders of the order were all of Scotch-Irish descent, and, with one exception, all belonged to the Presbyterian Church.<sup>2</sup> They had rather definite ideas concerning the propriety of various methods of conduct and behavior, and proceeded to put these ideas into effect in the selection of new members. All those who were inclined to become boisterous and uncontrollable, or who would not be congenial or who might be apt to disclose the secrets of the organization, or who were addicted to the use of liquor, were rigorously excluded.<sup>3</sup> This fact was rather forcibly impressed upon the mind of at least one highly undesirable candidate, who persisted in harassing the various members of the Klan with the most importunate supplications for admittance. Finally a

1. Brown, Lower South in Amer. Hist., 200.
2. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 20.
3. Wilson, KKK, Century Mag., VI, 402.



mock initiation was arranged, to take place upon the brow of a gently sloping, wooded hill in the dead of night. The Klansmen all appeared in their most terrifying costumes, and after the candidate had been reduced to a state of absolute petrification by fear and terror he was placed in a barrel and sent crashing down the slopes of the hill.<sup>1</sup> Needless to add, he never requested the honor of another initiation.

The clandestine meetings in the old house on the edge of town, from which emanated confused, mysterious noises, followed by still more mysterious silences, the various hints concerning the methods and purposes of the Klan which unavoidably leaked out, the exaggerated tales of the haunted ruins, and the inability to secure any definite, rational information, -- all these things naturally excited much curiosity and vague speculation amongst the people of Pulaski and the surrounding country. This feeling was materially heightened by the weird, supernatural appearance of the Lictor who during all meetings of the society, stationed himself at a certain spot on one of the roads leading into town, and who, when questioned concerning his identity, invariably replied in deep, sepulchral tones, "I am a spirit from the other world, killed at Chickamauga."<sup>2</sup> Comments, notices, and exaggerated accounts of some of the supposed practices of the order began to appear in the newspapers of the county; and during the summer and autumn of 1866 speculations and guesses concerning the nature of this mysterious organization formed the prevailing topic of con-

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 66.

2. Ibid, 74.



versation amongst the townspeople.<sup>1</sup> That great organ of inquisition, public curiosity, was completely baffled. No one could discover even the name of the society, nor the name of any single member, much less any information concerning its nature and purposes. The Klansmen were observing their oaths of absolute secrecy with scrupulous nicety, and were enjoying immensely the spectacle of seeing their fellow-citizens so utterly and hopelessly puzzled. If in public, they simply smiled inscrutably; but if assembled in a regular meeting of the Klan, they gave way to whole-hearted enjoyment of the situation.

Meanwhile the fame of this mysterious order began to be spread abroad. Newspapers all over the state, and even in neighboring states, began to print short accounts of the happenings at Pulaski. The Klan was attracting a large amount of notoriety in all quarters. A few fellows from the country immediately surrounding Pulaski had been admitted to membership. These began to petition for the privilege of founding other dens in various parts of the county; and most of such requests were readily granted.<sup>2</sup> A number of young men from neighboring counties and from adjacent states were initiated while visiting in Pulaski at various times; and many of these, upon their return home, organized branch dens.<sup>3</sup> Many of these dens, in turn, also gave rise to still other local organizations, some of which were started without any formal permission from the original Pulaski chapter.<sup>4</sup> Thus during the

1. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 68.
2. Wilson, *KKK*, Cent. Mag., VI, 402.
3. *Ibid*, 402.
4. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 69.



autumn and early winter of 1866 the spread of the Klan was very rapid. By the early spring of 1867 there were dens scattered through several states, including especially Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina.<sup>1</sup> All of these local societies recognized the leadership and primacy of the original Pulaski den in determining the affairs of the order; but the organization was very loose, and no real authority was ever exercised by the parent chapter.<sup>2</sup> The relations between the various dens were very indefinite and intangible, and communication was difficult and infrequent. To all intents and purposes each den was a practically independent organization, controlling its own policy and practices to a large extent, yet patterned rather closely after the original chapter at Pulaski.

Though greatly enlarged by this time, the Klan still maintained its original purposes and ideals. The subject of politics was rigidly tabooed in all meetings.<sup>3</sup> Fun and amusement were still the dominating motives, and mystery and secrecy were still allowed to hold full sway in the practices of the order. The membership requirements remained as strict as at first. Speaking particularly of this period, extending from the founding of the Klan up to the spring of 1867, Major Crowe, one of the original six members, said, "The order was careful in the admission of members and I have never known of a betrayal of the secrets of the order. I am proud to say that I never knew of one single act done by the genuine Ku Klux Klan that I am ashamed of or do not now endorse."<sup>4</sup>

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 69.
2. Ibid, 83.
3. Fleming, Doc. Hist, of Recon., II, 349.
4. Ibid, 22.





So far, then, the Klan, though much enlarged and subdivided into a large number of semi-independent dens, had been able to maintain its original purposes, practices, and ideals.



## CHAPTER VII

## The Transformation of Function and Nature

But a period of transformation was at hand. The members of the Klan began to find that their organization could be used, and used very effectively, for something besides mere amusement and diversion. They were beginning to discover a desperately serious purpose for their adolescent plaything. And they were rapidly being convinced that their mysterious methods and practices, conceived purely in a spirit of fun and mischievous play, could be employed with only slight modifications in far different designs. Thus during the spring and early summer of 1867 the Klan was changing rapidly from a group of amusement-seeking youths without any serious purpose, to a band of determined regulators, honestly yet firmly and fearlessly attempting to correct some of the most glaring evils in the anomalous, chaotic society of their day.<sup>1</sup>

This transformation was due to the combined action of three main sets of causes. In the first place, the weirdness, the mystery, the air of occultism, the cabalistic secrecy in which all actions were shrouded, the very inscrutable, enigmatic nature of the name itself, -- all these things combined to leave upon the minds of the members themselves an intangible yet strongly felt impression that the Klan should and would undertake some im-

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 83-85.



portant mission.<sup>1</sup> It was a peculiar psychological effect which proved to be of great importance. In the second place, there was the highly anomalous situation of chaos and disorder caused mostly by the disturbances and depredations of carpet-baggers and scoundwags who did not choose to behave, and of freed negroes who had not yet learned to behave without the threat of the lash,<sup>2</sup> -- a situation which, especially in the estimation of men of such a stamp as the Klansmen, fairly reeked with corruption and cried aloud for redress. And finally, and most important of all, there was the impression produced upon the public by the Klan's weird and mysterious ways. The attitude of the general body of outsiders very soon changed from one of baffled curiosity and indulgent tolerance to one composed of a mixture of awe, wonder, suspicion, and absolute terror, the proportions of these various constituent elements varying greatly in different individuals.<sup>3</sup> The negroes, in particular, were peculiarly susceptible to control by means of mystery and occultism.<sup>4</sup> After accidentally catching a glimpse, during one of his midnight prowlings, of the meeting of a number of Klansmen in their white, grotesque costumes, and observing their mysterious actions, corresponding in every particular to his ideas of the dreaded ghosts, a negro would be afraid to leave his cabin at night for a week thereafter. Consequently the amount of mischief which he could perform was very materially lessened. Travel at night along the roads on which the Lictors, wearing their fan-

1. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 71.
2. See Chapter II above for fuller discussion.
3. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 73.
4. Garner, *Recon. in Miss.*, 340;  
Brown, *Lower South in Amer. Hist.*, 202.



tastic garb and armed with their tremendous spears, were stationed was almost completely stopped.<sup>1</sup> Gradually it dawned upon the consciousness of the Klan that its mystery and weirdness were admirable instruments for regulating the conduct of the abjectly superstitious negroes, with their overmastering fear of the supernatural and their guileless belief in the occult. A survey of the whole situation only deepened this impression. The chaotic condition of the times, the feeling amongst the members that the society should attempt some really serious work, the superstition of the negroes, who were the main offenders, and the numerous instruments of mystery already at hand, -- all pointed clearly to the fact that the Klan should be changed into a band of regulators. And this transformation actually took place during the spring and summer of 1867.

With this transformation in policy came also a change in the personnel of the order and in the character of the membership. In addition to the young men who had comprised the whole of the early membership many older and more mature men were now admitted.<sup>2</sup> The qualifications with regard to character and morality were less rigorously enforced, and thus a number of imprudent and undesirable spirits had been allowed to enter the order.<sup>3</sup> With the continued spread of new dens, the organization became more and more loose and unwieldy, and it became increasingly difficult to control the actions of individual members and of the various semi-autonomous

1. Wilson, KKK, Cent. Mag., VI, 405.

2. Ibid, 405.

3. Ibid, 405.





dens. A few excesses were committed at various points, which, though not particularly serious, served to show that the general moral standard of the organization was gradually deteriorating.<sup>1</sup> In some cases there had been a too liberal interpretation of orders, and in other instances the tacit, unwritten laws of the Klan had been overstepped.<sup>2</sup>

However, the great bulk of the membership was still composed of the most respectable and most influential citizens of the various communities in which the Klan was represented.<sup>3</sup> These men sincerely deplored and heartily condemned the few excesses which had already taken place, and wished to prevent any similar occurrences in the future. In fact, a few of the more conservative members, realizing that in its extreme secrecy the society possessed an inherent point of weakness which would give opportunity for the performance by unscrupulous outsiders of many excesses under the cloak of Ku-Kluxism, wished to disband altogether.<sup>4</sup> But "the tie that bound them together was too shadowy to be cut or untied"<sup>5</sup> in this summary fashion; and besides, the Klan was needed to suppress the growing outrages. And yet it had thoroughly outgrown the rules and ideas meant for the little group of amusement-seekers at Pulaski. Therefore, the only alternative seemed to be a thorough reorganization of the whole order.

With this object in view, the Grand Cyclops of the Pulaski den, still tacitly recognized as the semi-official head of the

1. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 90.
2. *Ibid*, 83.
3. *Ku Klux Reports*, Miss. Test., 236; Garner, *Recon. in Miss.*, 345.
4. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 83.
5. *Ibid*, 83.



society, sent a summons to all dens of whose existence he was aware to appoint delegates to attend a convention to be held at Nashville, Tennessee, during the latter part of May, 1867.<sup>1</sup> The purposes of this convention, as outlined in the summons, were to reorganize the Klan on a plane corresponding to its greatly increased size and new purposes; to secure unity of purpose and concert of action; to hedge the members with such limitations and regulations as would best restrain them within proper limits; to bind the isolated dens together in a definite system with centralized authority and responsibility; to exact close supervision of all subordinates; to correct the evils and to promote order within the society; to endeavor to devise measures for regulating the evils of current society; and to retain as far as possible the means and methods already in use.<sup>2</sup>

In conformity with this request, most of the dens appointed delegates who attended the convention, which was held at the appointed time. Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Arkansas were represented in this convention.<sup>3</sup> A complete plan of reorganization, previously prepared, was submitted and adopted. For the first time a definite statement concerning the principles and purposes of the order was made. General N. B. Forrest was chosen to fill the high office of Grand Wizard of the Empire, and retained this im-

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 84.

2. Ibid, 84, 90.

3. Ibid, 85.



portant post until the disbandment of the Klan two years later.<sup>1</sup> After transacting a certain amount of purely routine business, the convention adjourned, and the delegates returned home without having attracted any attention.

Let us now examine the results of the labors of this Nashville convention, as embodied in the so-called Prescript of the Order, undoubtedly the most important single document bearing on the organization of the Klan.<sup>2</sup> This prescript really served as the formal constitution of the society, and contains a perfect mine of reliable information concerning the organization, duties and titles of officers, eligibility for membership, judicial system, obligations, and other facts of vital interest in regard to the Klan. It will therefore repay us to make a somewhat careful and detailed study of this instrument.

1. Ku Klux Reports, Miss. Test., 232, 586; Garner, Recon. in Miss., 339; Rose, Ku Klux Klan, or Invisible Empire, 22.
2. In reality there were two prescripts, the original one adopted by this convention in May, 1867, and a revised and amended prescript adopted a short time later, probably very early in 1868, though the exact date is unknown. A comparison of the texts of the two documents, however, reveals the fact that in all essential respects they are absolutely identical. The revised prescript elaborates and explains some points more fully than the original document, but no new material of any importance is introduced. There are a few very minor changes, as, for instance, the revised prescript uses three stars for the name instead of two, as in the original, and the Latin phrases or quotations placed at the top and bottom of each page in the first document are omitted in the second. But in all important aspects the two documents are the same, and therefore only the revised prescript will be considered, as it was the more widely circulated and contains more explanatory material than the original. The actual texts of both documents, exactly reproduced, are given in Lester and Wilson, The Ku Klux Klan, and it is from this source that the outline of the organization of the Klan given above is obtained.



In the first place, the name of the order was under no circumstances allowed to be written or printed, but was transmitted only by word of mouth.<sup>1</sup> In all documents three stars, \*\*\*, were substituted in place of the name. Thus, on the title-page we find the words, "The Revised and Amended Prescript of the Order of the \*\*\*", and under the heading, "Appellation", it is directed that, "This organization shall be styled and denominated, the Order of the \*\*\*."<sup>2</sup> The following curious bit of poetry, corresponding well with the general air of grotesqueness which pervaded the whole society, is found at the bottom of the title-page,

"An' now auld Cloots, I ken ye're thinkin',  
 A certain Ghoul is rantin', drinkin',  
 Some luckless night will send him linkin',  
     To your black pit;  
 But, faith! he'll turn a corner jinkin',  
     And cheat you yet!"<sup>3</sup>

And now we come to certain pieces of evidence which are highly important, as tending very strongly to prove that the Klan, at least during the greater part of its existence, was not composed of lawless blackguards bent only upon mischief and crime, but consisted for the most part of loyal, upright men who were honestly, though firmly, trying to better conditions in the way which they considered most effective. Since this document was never intended to be made public, but was meant for the use of members only, there was no reason for duplicity and falsification, and we may fairly accept it as an honest statement of the beliefs and purposes of the Klan. We quote at some length, in order to convey

1. Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, KKK, 157.

2. Ibid, 160.

3. Ibid, 155, 156.





a portion of the atmosphere as well as the meaning of this portion of the instrument.

"Creed. -- We, the Order of the \*\*\*, reverentially acknowledge the majesty and supremacy of the Divine Being, and recognize the goodness and providence of the same. And we recognize our relation to the United States Government, the supremacy of the Constitution, the Constitutional Laws thereof, and the Union of States thereunder. -- Character and Objects of the Order. -- This is an institution of Chivalry, Humanity, Mercy, and Patriotism, embodying in its genius and principles all that is chivalric in conduct, noble in sentiment, generous in manhood, and patriotic in purpose, its peculiar objects being: (1) To protect the weak, innocent, and defenceless, from the indignities, wrongs, and outrages of the lawless, violent, and brutal; to relieve the injured and oppressed; to succor the suffering, and especially the widows and orphans of Confederate soldiers; (2) to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, and all laws passed in conformity thereto, and to protect the States and the people thereof from all invasion from any source whatever: (3) To aid and assist in the execution of all constitutional laws, and to protect the people from unlawful seizure, and from trial except by their peers in conformity to the laws of the land."<sup>1</sup>

1. Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, KYK, 154, 155.



The organization of the Klan was now made as strict and definite as it had before been loose and inexplicit. The management of affairs was highly centralized and responsibility definitely fixed by means of a careful gradation of territorial subdivisions and corresponding official ranks. The whole territory of the Klan was made coterminous with the boundaries of the states of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee.<sup>1</sup> This uttermost extent of the order was known as the Empire, and was presided over by the highest officer of the society, the Grand Wizard, assisted by ten staff-officers known as Genii. The powers of this officer were practically autocratic, for he was authorized "to determine finally all questions of paramount importance to the interests of the order."<sup>2</sup> The Empire was then divided into Realms, coterminous with individual states, the affairs of each Realm being managed by a Grand Dragon and his eight Hydras; the Realms were subdivided into Dominions, corresponding to Congressional Districts, each Dominion being governed by a Grand Titan and his six Furies; the Dominions were further divided into Provinces, coterminous with county boundaries, and each Province was presided over by a Grand Giant and his four Goblins; while each Province in turn was divided into a number of Dens, or local chapters, presided over by a Grand Cyclops and his two Night-Hawks.<sup>3</sup> Each local Den had in addition to these three

1. Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, KKK, 157.
2. Ibid, 160.
3. Ibid, 155, 156.



officers a Grand Magi, or Vice-President, a Grand Monk, or Chaplain, a Grand Scribe, or Secretary, a Grand Exchequer, or Treasurer, a Grand Turk, or Sergeant-at-Arms, and a Grand Sentinel, or Outer Guard.<sup>1</sup> The individual members of the body politic were known as Ghouls.<sup>2</sup> Thus it will be seen that the territorial subdivisions and the official ranks were carefully graded, and that responsibility was definitely distributed, with almost mathematical exactness.

The duties of all officers were very carefully and exactly specified in the Prescript, so that each official knew just what he must do, what he might do if he chose, and what he was prohibited from doing. The Grand Wizard of the Empire was to be elected biennially by the Grand Dragons of all the Realms; while the Grand Magi and Grand Monk were to be elected annually by all the Ghouls of each Den.<sup>3</sup> All the other offices, however, were appointive, each head officer of each territorial subdivision having power to appoint the presiding officer of the division just below him, and each chief officer of any division, in turn, possessing full authority to appoint all of his immediate subordinates.<sup>4</sup>

The prescript also provided for a carefully elaborated judicial system, consisting of a separate Court in connection with the headquarters of each division. The members of each Court were to be appointed by the chiefs of their respective departments; while the proceedings were to be those of a regular court-martial.<sup>5</sup> These Courts had jurisdiction over all matters connected even in

1. Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, KKK, 156.

2. Ibid, 156.

3. Ibid, 163.

4. Ibid, 164.

5. Ibid, 167.



remotest manner with the affairs of the Klan; and if we may believe the evidence which has come down to us, their judgments were both swift and just. Major Lamar Fontaine, of Mississippi, a prominent member of the Klan, says in a letter to a friend, written more than a decade after the disbandment in 1869: "In the courts of this invisible, silent, and mighty government, there were no hung juries, no laws delayed, no reversals on senseless technicalities by any Supreme Court, because from its Court there was no appeal, and punishment was sure and swift, because there was no executive to pardon."<sup>1</sup>

The revenues of the Klan were to be obtained from several sources. An initiation fee of one dollar was charged, to be paid at the time of initiation;<sup>2</sup> and a fee of ten dollars was charged by the government of the Empire for each additional copy of the prescript issued to the various Dens.<sup>3</sup> Moderate fines were also assessed for certain infringements of the rules of the order.<sup>4</sup> The sources of revenue to the individual Dens consisted of fees, fines, and a per capita tax, to be levied in any amount. "whenever the Grand Cyclops shall deem such a tax necessary and indispensable to the interests and objects of the Order."<sup>5</sup> Each department above the Den was to get its revenue from a ten per cent tax on all the regular revenues of the division just below it, and this amount might be increased by a special tax, indefinite in amount, on the lower division whenever the Grand officer of the assessing depart-

1. Rose, Ku Klux Klan, 73.
2. Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, KKK, 175.
3. Ibid, 169.
4. Ibid, 169.
5. Ibid, 169.





ment deemed it necessary.<sup>1</sup>

In order to be considered eligible for membership in the Klan a candidate had to be at least eighteen years of age, and must have been recommended by some friend or intimate, who was a member, to the Investigating Committee of the Den, composed ex officio of the Grand Cyclops, the Grand Magi, and the Grand Monk.<sup>2</sup> And only after this Committee had investigated his antecedents and his past and present standing and connections, and had pronounced him worthy to become a member, was he allowed to proceed with the initiation ceremony.

This initiation ceremony was curious and impressive. The candidate was required to take voluntarily several oaths or obligations, and to answer satisfactorily certain interrogatories, while kneeling with his right hand raised to Heaven, and his left hand resting on the Bible.<sup>3</sup> The preliminary obligation read as follows: "I, ---, solemnly swear, or affirm, that I will never reveal anything that I may this day (or night) learn concerning the order of the \*\*\*, and that I will true answer make to such interrogatories as may be put to me touching my competency for admission into the same. So help me God."<sup>4</sup> He was then asked to respond to a list of ten interrogatories, of which the following were the most important and the most typical: "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Radical Republican Party, or the Loyal League, or the Grand Army of the Republic? Are you opposed to negro equality, both social and political? Are you in

1. Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, KKK, 169.
2. Ibid, 170.
3. Ibid, 170.
4. Ibid, 171.



favor of a white man's government in this country? Did you belong to the Federal Army during the late war, and fight against the South during the existence of the same? Are you in favor of Constitutional liberty, and a Government of equitable laws instead of a Government of violence and oppression? Are you in favor of the re-enfranchisement and emancipation of the white men of the South, and the restitution of the Southern people to all their rights, alike proprietary, civil, and political?"<sup>1</sup> If the answers to these questions were unsatisfactory, or if the candidate declined to go any further, he was discharged, after being warned not to reveal anything he had already learned.<sup>2</sup> But if the answers were all satisfactory, and the candidate desired to go on with the ceremony, he was then made to take this final oath: "I, ---, of my own free will and accord, and in the presence of Almighty God, do solemnly swear, or affirm, that I will never reveal to anyone not a member of the Order of the \*\*\*, by any intimation, sign, symbol, word, or act, or in any other manner whatever, any of the secrets, signs, grips, pass-words, or mysteries of the Order or the \*\*\*, or that I am a member of the same, or that I know anyone who is a member; and that I will abide by the Prescript and Edicts of the Order of the \*\*\*. So help me God."<sup>3</sup> The initiating officer then explained to the new member the character and objects of the order, introduced him to the mysteries and secrets of the Klan, and read the Prescript and the Edicts.<sup>4</sup> This completed the actual ceremony of initiation, though the candidate

1. Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, KKK, 171, 172.

2. Ibid, 172.

3. Ibid, 173.

4. Ibid, 173.



had still to take the real oath of the order, which was not administered, however, until a later date.<sup>1</sup>

Under the heading of Edicts, or by-laws, we find the following provisions: "The origin, mysteries, and Ritual of this Order shall never be written, but the same shall be communicated orally; the most profound and rigid secrecy concerning any and everything that relates to the Order, shall at all times be maintained; any member who shall reveal or betray the secrets of the Order shall suffer the extreme penalties of the law; no member shall be allowed to take any intoxicating spirits to any meeting of a Den, nor be allowed to attend a meeting while intoxicated, under penalty of a fine ranging from one to five dollars; any member may be expelled from the Order by a majority vote of the Officers and Ghouls of the Den to which he belongs;" and "Dens may make such additional Edicts for their control and government as they may deem requisite and necessary, if not conflicting with the Prescript."<sup>2</sup> Many dens availed themselves of the privilege granted by this last clause, and enacted a large number of regulations especially suited to their respective local needs.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a local den in South Carolina, where the opposition to the Klan was particularly venomous, enacted that any member who betrayed or divulged any of the matters of the order should suffer death.<sup>4</sup>

At this point there was interpolated into the text of the Prescript a very curious and cleverly contrived document known

1. Ku Klux Reports, N. Car. Test., 422.
2. Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, KKK, 174-176.
3. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 185-189.
4. Ibid, 185.



as the Register, or cipher code, of the Klan. This was used in all written communications between the various dens and officials of the order, and in all public orders or warnings.<sup>1</sup> It consisted of a list of thirty-one adjectives, the first group of twelve designating the morning hours, the second group of seven standing for the days of the week, and the third group of twelve being used in place of the evening hours.<sup>2</sup> Thus a complete system of chronology was formulated, and since no regular sequence was followed in the arrangement of the words, it was practically impossible for any outsider to decipher the meaning. Although this code could be used only for dates, it was very important in setting times for meetings, consultations, places of rendez-vous, and other similar purposes. Following is the list of adjectives comprising the code:

Group I: - Morning Hours: dismal; mystic; stormy; peculiar; blooming; brilliant; painful; portentous; fading; melancholy; glorious; gloomy.

Group II: - Days of the Week: white; green; yellow; amber; purple; crimson; emerald.

Group III: - Evening Hours: fearful; startling; wonderful; alarming; mournful; appalling; hideous; frightful; awful; horrible; dreadful; last.<sup>3</sup>

Besides this general code, many of the dens also possessed supplementary codes of their own for designating various local meeting-

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 41.
2. Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, KKK, 176.
3. Ibid, 176.

Main body of faint, illegible text, likely a letter or document, occupying the central portion of the page.



places, purposes of a meeting, the nature of the activities to be undertaken, etc.<sup>1</sup> Thus, a summons reading, "Serpent's Cove, Crimson Day, Dreadful Hour, Hell's Errand", might mean to meet at a certain spot in a forest at 11 P. M. on Friday for the purpose of whipping a number of obstreperous negroes. Though perfectly intelligible to anyone familiar with the code, such an announcement would be considered only as the most utter nonsense by any outsider, and therefore there was no danger of the meeting becoming known beforehand.

The general password of the Klan, acceptable throughout the whole extent of the Empire, was simply "Cumberland."<sup>2</sup> In addition to this, however, practically all of the Dens possessed other local pass-words for use by their own members within their limited territory. Thus, in one county in Mississippi, the regular pass-word was "Avalanche"; while "Kosciusko" was used as a signal of distress and a call for assistance.<sup>3</sup> The sign of recognition at night for two parties going in opposite directions was as follows:<sup>4</sup>

Leader of First Party, "Hail!"

Leader of Second Party, "Hail Who?"

Leader of First Party, "Mount."

Leader of Second Party, "Nebo."

After this exchange of pass-words, the two parties would pass each other in dead silence. Placing the right hand on the chin was the sign of recognition between members during the daytime, while

1. Ku Klux Reports, Miss. Test., 232.
2. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 176.
3. Ku Klux Reports, Miss. Test., 232.
4. *Ibid*, 232.



on the street or in any other public place.<sup>1</sup> The answer consisted of grasping the left lapel of the coat with the left hand.<sup>2</sup> This particular form of recognition during the daytime seems to have been fairly general throughout the Empire.

After this final admonition to observe the strictest secrecy, "Hush! thou art not to utter what I am; bethink thee! it was our covenant!,"<sup>3</sup> the Prescript is brought to a close in the following words: "L'Envoi. -- To the lovers of law and order, peace and justice, we send greeting; and to the shades of the venerated dead we affectionately dedicate the Order of the \*\*\*. Resurgamus."<sup>4</sup>

After a new member had been in the order for several weeks, had been tested in various ways, and had been given an opportunity to become familiar with the purposes and methods of the organization, he was then required to take the actual oath of the Klan.<sup>5</sup> This oath was never allowed to be written or printed, but was memorized by all members immediately after taking it, and was always communicated orally.<sup>6</sup> The following version was reproduced from memory by a former member of the Klan several years after the disbandment, and therefore is probably not absolutely accurate, though the meaning and general form have been preserved: "I, before the great immaculate God of heaven and earth, do take and subscribe to the following sacred binding oath and obligation: I promise and swear that I will uphold and

1. Ku Klux Reports, Miss. Test., 233.

2. Ibid, 233.

3. Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, KKK, 177.

4. Ibid, 178.

5. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 197.

6. Ibid, 197;

Ku Klux Reports, N. Car. Test., 422.



defend the Constitution of the United States as it was handed down by our forefathers in its original purity. I promise and swear that I will reject and oppose the principles of the radical party in all its forms, and forever maintain and contend that intelligent white men shall govern this country. I promise and pledge myself to assist, according to my pecuniary circumstances, all brothers in distress. Females, widows, and their households shall ever be specially in my care and protection. I promise and swear that I will obey all instructions given me by my chief, and should I ever divulge or cause to be divulged any secrets, signs, or passwords of the Invisible Empire, I must meet with the fearful and just penalty of the traitor, which is death, death, death, at the hands of my brethren."<sup>1</sup>

By means of this Nashville convention, then, the Klan embodied in its Prescript the new purposes which were to actuate it, and outlined the new form of centralized organization by means of which it was to be more efficiently governed. Instead of a mere group of amusement-seekers, the society had been transformed into a band of regulators, who were setting themselves the desperately serious task of eradicating the odious evils of the society in which they lived. Since the ordinary forces of government were powerless to enforce the laws and to grant security and protection to everyone,<sup>2</sup> they decided to take the law into their own hands, and to constitute themselves a body for its enforcement. And they meant to do this firmly and honestly, using no more violence and creating no more disturbance than was absolutely

1. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 197;  
 Ku Klux Reports, N. Car. Test., 422.
2. *Plenings*, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 59-60.



necessary. The purposes of the Klansmen at this time were thoroughly honest, and their ideals were high. They proposed to continue with very little change the old methods and practices, attempting to push to its extreme limits the power of the mysterious over the minds of men.<sup>1</sup> Some of the former practices were slightly modified, and a few new features were added; but the essential factors of mystery, secrecy, and grotesqueness were maintained, and steps taken to deepen their impression on the public mind. With this end in view one important change of policy was undertaken. The disguised Klansmen now began to court publicity as assiduously as they had formerly shunned it, and appeared openly in various places, when and where least expected.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, however, the activities of the Klan did not always correspond with its purposes and ideals. The evils to be overcome proved to be far more obstinate and tenacious than had been anticipated. Resolved to use only such an amount of force as was absolutely necessary, yet at the same time fully determined to go to any length, not thoroughly criminal, in order to improve conditions, the Klansmen soon found themselves combating violence with violence and fighting fire with fire. Thinking that an ounce of prevention would be sufficient to ameliorate the situation, they unexpectedly found themselves compelled to use a pound of cure. Some of the men within the order began to evince a strong inclination to indulge in unwarranted violence, and many lawless spirits totally unconnected with the Klan began to copy

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 91;  
Wilson, KKK, Cent. Mag., VI, 405.
2. Ibid.





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its disguises and to commit many depredations with impunity under the cloak of its unwilling sanction.<sup>1</sup> The element of secrecy, so strongly emphasized, came to be both a stronghold and a weakness. And so the practices of the Klan from this time on present a curious mixture of high ideals and low practices, of open indulgence and enforced restraint, of the violation of law with one hand in order to enforce it with the other.

1. Wilson, *KKK*, Cent. Mag. VI, 407.  
Brown, *Lower South in Amer. Hist.*, 206;  
Fleming, *Doc. Hist. of Recon.*, II, 328.



## CHAPTER VIII

## The Klan at Its Zenith: Methods and Practices

The period of the Klan's greatest activity and influence may be taken as extending from the summer of 1867 to the early autumn of 1868. During this time it was easily the most important single influence operative upon the social conditions of the South. General Forrest, the Grand Wizard, estimated that during the summer of 1868 the membership in Tennessee alone was approximately forty thousand, while that of the whole Klan, including the entire South, was about five hundred and fifty thousand.<sup>1</sup> This figure represented only slightly less than half of the entire adult male white population of the Southern States.<sup>2</sup> Of the remainder who were not actual members, practically all were more or less heartily in sympathy with the movement, and either actively encouraged it or at least refrained from discouraging it.<sup>3</sup> Thus it will be seen that the movement had attained truly gigantic proportions. Dens were situated in practically every county of the South, except in the so-called Black Belt of Lower Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, where another highly similar organization, the Knights of the White Camelia, held sway.<sup>4</sup> Even the women took an active interest in the affairs of the order, and played an important part by fashioning most of the grotesque

1. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 95.

2. *Ibid.*, 96.

3. *Ibid.*, 96.

4. Fleming, *Civil War and Recon. in Ala.*, 669.



costumes which formed such an essential feature of the Klansman's costume.<sup>1</sup>

A curious little document which illustrates this last-mentioned fact and also describes one of the many styles of costumes worn by the members of the society is quoted by Mrs. Rose in her little book, "The Ku Klux Klan," and reads as follows:

"Headquarters, K. K. K.

Anno Domini, 1868:

Misses X and Y: Knowing you to be friends of the K K K, the G. Cyclops takes the privilege of requesting you to make a couple of robes for some of his poor, needy followers, and if you will be so kind as to make them the protecting eye of the G. G. Cyclops will ever rest upon you. Thinking that you will make them, the following are the directions: Make 2 robes reaching to the ground, open in front, bordered with white 3 in. wide, white cuffs and collars, half moons on the left breast with stars in center of each moon, and caps of a conical shape 12 in. high with a tassel, with white cloth hanging over the face so as to conceal it, and behind so as to hide the back of the head. Make the first of the caps red, the second and third white, and the rest red. By order of G. G. Cyclops.

Abel Haassanen, G. Scribe.

The Grand Turk will be after them on the night of the 15th, at 10 o'clock. You are requested to burn this after reading."<sup>2</sup>

1. Rose, YKK, or Invisible Empire, 44.
2. Ibid, 45.



Since the original paper upon which this note was written has come down to us, we may assume that the good ladies to whom it was addressed, actuated perhaps by a love of souvenirs and prospective heirlooms which is often thought to be characteristic of their sex, neglected to observe the last request.

These fanciful and grotesque costumes, which formed the main contribution of the women of the South to the cause of Ku-Kluxism, were not at all uniform or standardized, but varied greatly in color, material, style, and workmanship.<sup>1</sup> The variation, however, was largely between different localities so that the individual members of any certain Den or vicinity were dressed approximately alike.<sup>2</sup> The most common form of disguise consisted of a long loose-fitting gown, usually white, reaching to the shoe tops and belted at the waist, a face-mask with holes cut in it for the eyes, nose, and mouth, and a conical, card-board hat about eighteen or twenty inches high.<sup>3</sup> The holes in the face-mask were usually lined with red or black braid; while in some cases a head-piece was worn, consisting of a piece of cloth which in front reached to the stomach and was rounded into a point, while in the rear it covered only the top of the head.<sup>4</sup> When reversed, this back portion reached to a point just above the eyebrows; and while riding the head-piece was often so worn in order to afford greater convenience in using the eyes.<sup>5</sup> The high, funnel-shaped cardboard

1. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 674; Rose, KKK, or Invisible Empire, 45.
2. Fleming, op. cit., 674.
3. Ibid, 675.
4. Ku Klux Reports, Miss. Test., 274.
5. Ibid, 274.





hat, tapering to a point at the top, was covered with cloth on which were painted crosses, skulls, crossbones, and other mystifying devices.<sup>1</sup> Very often a tassel of varying size and color was suspended from the top of this hat by a string; and sometimes two horns were attached to the sides in such a way as to give the wearer a decidedly Mephistophelian appearance.<sup>2</sup> In some cases the gowns reached only to the knees, and were slashed up the sides for convenience in running.<sup>3</sup> In a few places in South Carolina the gown was discarded altogether in favor of a very loose, baggy pair of trousers and a short jacket with long, flowing sleeves.<sup>4</sup> Cheap, fancy calico was most largely used in making colored costumes, while an ordinary bed-sheet was the ruling favorite in fashioning white disguises.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes a smooth, stiff cloth was employed which glistened in the moonlight and rattled with every movement.<sup>6</sup> Crosses, stars, crescents, and other devices made of fiery red cloth, were often worn on the breast.<sup>7</sup> The horses were also disguised by means of large sheets or strips of white cloth which were fastened to the saddle or held on by means of belts; and often the sound of their hoof-beats was muffled by means of cloth pads which were tied over their shoes.<sup>8</sup>

The central idea of all this apparent tomfoolery, of course,

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 364.
2. Ibid., 364.
3. Garner, Recon. in Miss., 340;  
Ku Klux Reports, Miss. Test., 274.
4. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 364.
5. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 675.
6. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 364.
7. Ibid., 364.
8. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 676.



was to mystify and terrify the more superstitious portion of the populace, including particularly the negroes. With this very definite end in view, a large number of highly effective devices were invented. Skeleton sheeps'-heads or cows'-heads or human skulls were often carried on the saddle-bows.<sup>1</sup> A framework, fitting the shoulders of a Ghoul, was devised which gave him the appearance of a veritable Goliath ten or twelve feet in height.<sup>2</sup> Oftentimes a tongue about six inches in length and made of red flannel, which could be manipulated by the actual tongue of the wearer, was allowed to protrude from the orifice cut in the face-mask for the mouth.<sup>3</sup> In other instances a fringe of short quills, sewed to the face-mask on the edge of this opening for the mouth, gave the appearance of a set of tremendous teeth, and in catching the breath of the wearer while speaking emitted a peculiarly shrill and grating sound.<sup>4</sup> One of the favorite tricks of a Klansman was to reach up and remove his own head, apparently, and attempt to hand it to a bystander. This was accomplished by having a gown fastened over the head by means of a draw-string, and over this an artificial skull of gourd or paste-board which could be readily removed.<sup>5</sup> Another highly effective device consisted of a skeleton hand made of bone or wood, which was held by means of a short handle.<sup>6</sup> The possessor of

1. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 676.
2. *Ibid*, 676.
3. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 364.
4. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 674.
5. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 97.
6. *Ibid*, 98;  
Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 676.



one of these hands was always in an affable mood, and insisted upon shaking hands with everyone whom he encountered, with results which can be readily imagined. Perhaps the most ingenious contrivance of all, however, was that of a large water-proof leather bag, capable of containing three full buckets of water, which was worn under the loose robe or gown in front, with a funnel-shaped projection extending up to the wearer's neck.<sup>1</sup> Equipped with one of these bags, carefully concealed, a Klansman would ride up to a negroe's cabin in the dead of night and loudly request a drink of water. When a cup was offered, it was scornfully refused, and a large bucket demanded. Three buckets filled with water were then raised to the mouth in rapid succession and the contents poured into the leather bag.<sup>2</sup> But to the negro, watching the performance with eyes bulging with fright and amazement, it seemed as though this enormous quantity of water was being used to quench a burning thirst; and when the grotesquely accoutered visitor set down the bucket for the third time, and said, with a satisfying smack of the lips, "That's fine, that's the first drink of water I've had since I was killed at Shiloh," and then incidentally remarked that he had ridden a thousand miles since sunset in order to obtain it,<sup>4</sup> the terror and stupefaction of the superstitious negro knew no bounds. In Hinds County, Mississippi, several Klansmen improved upon this device by replacing the leather bag with a rubber suit which was strapped to the front of

1. Lester and Wilson, XXX, 98.

2. Ibid, 98.

3. Ibid, 98.

4. Ibid, 99.



the body, and which held thirteen buckets of water.<sup>1</sup>

The effects of these costumes, tricks, and devices upon the ignorant and superstitious negroes may readily be imagined. In some localities they were thrown into a perfect frenzy of terror and mystification.<sup>2</sup> Absurdly exaggerated tales and impressions of the activities of the Klan were widely circulated and religiously accepted by the credulous blacks.<sup>3</sup> There was not even a thought of any rational explanation of the facts, nor such remarkable phenomena could only be occasioned by a recourse to the supernatural. The most common belief was that the Klansmen were the spirits or ghosts of Confederate soldiers who had been killed in battle.<sup>4</sup> In that section of Mississippi adjoining the Yazoo swamps there was a current story among the negroes that the sheeted figures were the emissaries of a horrible monster, which spent most of its time "hollering for fried nigger meat", a delicacy which its agents were supposed to procure.<sup>5</sup> So strongly did such stories, inspired by the activities of the Klan, impress the negroes that in many places they were afraid to leave their cabins after nightfall, and consequently their conduct improved greatly.<sup>6</sup>

In order to strengthen and heighten still further these prevalent ideas, the Klan held a series of great parades from time to time. Probably the most elaborate were those which took place throughout Tennessee on the night of July 4, 1867, in pur-

1. Rose, KKK, or Invisible Empire, 56.
2. Brown, Lower South in Amer. Hist., 205.
3. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 92.
4. Ibid., 93.
5. Ibid., 93.
6. Brown, Lower South in Amer. Hist., 205.





surrence of an order issued by the Grand Dragon of the Realm of Tennessee, calling upon the Grand Giants of all the Provinces in his Realm to hold parades in their respective capital towns at that time.<sup>1</sup> The one at Pulaski may be taken as a typical example. On the morning of July 4, slips of paper bearing the words, "The Order will parade the streets tonight", were found scattered over the walks and posted upon the walls of a large number of buildings.<sup>2</sup> These slips served their purpose by arousing great curiosity and excitement amongst the townspeople. Immediately after nightfall the members of the Klan began to assemble at several designated spots just outside the city, where they donned their robes and disguised the horses.<sup>3</sup> About ten o'clock a skyrocket was sent up from the town as a signal,<sup>4</sup> and the parade began. In single file and with funereal slowness, the long line of mysterious, shrouded horsemen wound in and out among streets lined with spectators.<sup>5</sup> Absolute silence and perfect discipline were maintained, broken only now and then by the short, shrill blast of a whistle used in giving commands or an occasional halt while some Klansman, having removed his artificial head, requested a negro to hold it for him, or offered to shake hands with his skeleton fingers.<sup>6</sup> For two hours the sheeted figures marched and counter-marched so skilfully that they gave the impression of constituting only one single, interminable line;<sup>7</sup> and then suddenly they began to file out of

1. Brown, Lower South in Amer. Hist., 205.

2. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 92.

3. Ibid, 93.

4. Ibid, 93.

5. Brown Lower South in Amer. Hist., 205.

6. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 94.

7. Ibid, 94.



the city as silently and as mysteriously as they had come, and were soon lost to view. The exaggerated effect which this event produced upon the spectators may be readily comprehended from the fact that the estimates concerning the number of men who took part in the parade varied from three thousand to ten thousand, while in reality only four hundred horsemen actually participated.<sup>1</sup>

In many of these parades the grand banner of the Klan was carried by a color-bearer, much after the manner of a regimental flag.<sup>2</sup> This banner was made of yellow cloth, with a red scalloped border three inches in width. In form it was an isosceles triangle, five feet long and three feet wide at the staff. Upon the yellow background was painted, in black, the figure of a dracovalans, or flying dragon; while above the dragon was inscribed the following Latin motto, "Quod Semper, Quod Ubique, Quod ab Omnibus."<sup>3</sup>

The Dens, or places of rendezvous, from which the Klansmen issued forth to take part in these parades or to engage in the more serious business of chastising some obstreperous negro or obnoxious carpet-bagger, were always situated in obscure, secret places which corresponded well with the character and nature of the society. Small clearings surrounded by dense forests, isolated bits of solid ground in the midst of a swamp, unfrequented caves which were difficult of access, and lonely, deserted, and dilapidated buildings, particularly if they were popularly supposed to be haunted, -- these were the favorite meeting-places

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 92.
2. Rose, KKK, or Invisible Empire, 59.
3. See Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, KKK, 147, for description of banner.



of the Klan.<sup>1</sup> All business of the organization, including meetings and punitive expeditions, was transacted at night, under cover of darkness.<sup>2</sup> Naturally, this fact added materially to the effectiveness of the devices of mystery and secrecy employed by the Klan. Regular meetings were held about once a week, and special meetings could be called by the presiding officer of the den at any time.<sup>3</sup> All meetings were presided over by the Grand Cyclops, and admission was by pass-word only.<sup>4</sup> At these assemblies a general discussion of community affairs took place, with special emphasis upon the actions of undesirable characters.<sup>5</sup> A motion to "wait upon" certain individuals could be made by any member, and if passed by a majority vote it was then decided by means of an open discussion and another vote just what form the punishment should take and when, how, and by whom it should be administered.<sup>6</sup> No chastisement was supposed to be inflicted by any member without first obtaining the official sanction of the Klan in this manner.<sup>7</sup> A regular system of messengers was in use between the various Dens in a certain vicinity, and whenever possible all communication was verbal.<sup>8</sup> In ordinary cases each Den carried out its own decrees; but on those rare occasions when life was to be taken or serious punishment inflicted, a neighboring Den was invited to perform the deed, while the members of the local Den remained away

1. Rose, KKK, or Invisible Empire, 38.
2. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 99.
3. Ibid, 99.
4. Garner, Recon. in Miss., 339.
5. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 681.
6. Garner, Recon. in Miss., 339.
7. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 99.
8. Rose, KKK, or Invisible Empire, 60.



and arranged for an alibi in case of investigation.<sup>1</sup> In this way all possibility of recognition was also obviated.

Though the members of the Klan were all Democrats, with scarcely a single exception, the society as a body took little part in politics.<sup>2</sup> Political discussions in the meetings were severely frowned upon,<sup>3</sup> and this, coupled with the fact that no liquor was allowed and that no member was permitted to attend while in an intoxicated condition,<sup>4</sup> caused the assemblies to be, on the whole, very sane and orderly.

Another factor which contributed greatly to the success of the society was the stress placed upon the sacredness of the oath of secrecy. This oath demanded supreme allegiance to the affairs of the Klan, and was so heavily binding that it was regarded as far transcending in importance all other obligations.<sup>5</sup> For this reason very little of importance concerning the affairs of the order ever leaked out until long after the final disbandment.<sup>6</sup> As jurors, members of the society refused to convict a fellow-Klansman who was on trial; as witnesses they absolutely denied all knowledge of the order and warped their testimony so as to help its members; as legislators and officials, they exceeded their powers or neglected their duties in order to assist and encourage the society.<sup>7</sup> Even an oath taken in a court of justice was re-

1. Rose, KKK, or Invisible Empire, 61; Garner, Recon. in Miss., 339.
2. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 689.
3. *Ibid.*, 689.
4. Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, KKK, 174.
5. See copy of oath quoted in Chapter VII above; Ku Klux Reports, Miss. Text., 240.
6. Rose, KKK, or Invisible Empire, 68.
7. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 680; Publishings of Trinity Historical Society, Series III, 119.





guarded as subordinate when in conflict with the Ku Klux oath, and members perjured themselves in the courtroom again and again.<sup>1</sup> This is clearly illustrated by the testimony of General A. B. Forrest before the Congressional Committee of Investigation in 1871. Although he talked freely about the abstract principles and general beliefs of the order, he exhibited a remarkable forgetfulness concerning all actual facts and details; and it is very evident, in the light of our present knowledge of his official connection with the Klan, that he was intentionally suppressing a large amount of information, and believed this course to be justified by his Ku Klux oath.<sup>2</sup>

The more definite purposes of the Klan varied largely with the locality. In some places the local dens were purely protective, aiming only to defend themselves against the ravages of the negroes and the lawless bands of guerrillas and horse-thieves;<sup>3</sup> in other places they wished to check the excesses of the blacks;<sup>4</sup> in some instances they desired to drive out the ignorant, corrupt, violent officials, especially the carpet-baggers and scoundrels;<sup>5</sup> while in some cases they aspired to regulate the morals of an entire community, and dealt with negro schools, mixed marriages, houses of ill-fame, and all other subjects of public morality, as well as insolent negroes, alien carpet-baggers, and renegade scoundrels.<sup>6</sup> But in general the purposes of the Klan were mainly pre-

1. Ku Klux Reports, Miss. Test., 240; Rose, KKK, or Invisible Empire, 68.
2. See Testimony of Gen. Forrest, in Ku Klux Reports, Miscellaneous Test., XIII, 3-35.
3. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 528.
4. Ibid, 328.
5. Ibid, 328.
6. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 682.



ventive. The members wished to deter people from wrong-doing, and only in the minority of cases did they resort to actual physical punishment,<sup>1</sup> although of course the latter method offered the only effective means of dealing with offenses already committed.

In the earlier stages of the Klan, when the negroes were thrown into paroxysms of fear at the sight of a Ku Klux costume and even the whites were still mystified and perplexed, thoroughly peaceful measures were usually sufficient to produce the desired results. A visit to a house in the dead of night by a few members clad in Ku Klux regalia and the performance of one or more of the favorite tricks, such as taking off the head, shaking hands with the skeleton fingers, or drinking three buckets of water, followed by a few words of advice and admonition purporting to come from a spirit of the underworld, usually sufficed to induce better behavior on the part of the occupants of the building.<sup>2</sup> But gradually people began to learn that there were only human beings behind these disguises, persons of real flesh and blood like themselves; and therefore their respect for the devices of mystery was very materially lessened.<sup>3</sup> The old methods no longer produced the desired results. Therefore the Klan began to resort to a system of written and printed threats or warnings, usually addressed to certain individual persons, stating what was expected and warning them of the terrible consequences which would follow upon their refusal to observe these requests.<sup>4</sup> In this way

1. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 99;  
Fleming, *Doc. Hist. of Recon.*, II, 370.
2. Fleming, *Civil War and Recon. in Ala.*, 681.
3. *Ibid.*, 681.
4. *Ibid.*, 679.



negroes were persuaded to behave decently, Northern object-lesgers were forced to leave the country, and scoundrels were compelled to resign their venally lucrative offices. Since people were still mightily afraid of this mysterious organization and highly uncertain as to its function and nature, the offending parties usually heeded these warnings with alacrity<sup>1</sup>; and in the few cases in which they neglected or refused to do so, the Klan carried out its threats by inflicting summary corporal punishment.

Besides being used to warn malefactors, these instruments also served to mystify the public and, by means of the cipher codes described above,<sup>2</sup> could be employed in giving orders and notices to members of the Klan. Those which were essentially only individual warnings were usually posted about the premises of the person for whom they were intended;<sup>3</sup> while the notices or orders of a more general nature were often published in various newspapers which happened to be controlled by members of the Klan, and usually prefaced by the statement that they had been found or sent in for publication.<sup>4</sup> These orders and warnings constitute the most remarkable set of documents that has come down to us from the days of the Ku Klux Klan; and no discussion of this organization would be complete without several examples of these morbidly interesting instruments. Their authors deliberately attempted to produce the most shockingly repugnant and terrifying compositions of which they were capable. For the most part, the rhetor-

1. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 189.

2. See Chapter VII above.

3. Garner, *Recon. in Miss.*, 341.

4. Fleming, *Civil War and Recon. in Ala.*, 679.



ic is abominable, the diction is execrable, and the general tone is exceedingly low and vulgar; yet a few of these documents deserve to rank amongst the most striking examples in our literature of the grotesque, the fantastic, the horrible, and the mysterious. Take, for instance, this phantasmagorical ebullition from the pen of Ryland Randolph, editor of the Independent Monitor of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and published in his paper in April, 1868:<sup>1</sup>

"Hollow Hell, Devil's Den, Horrible  
Shadows. Ghostly Sepulchre.  
Head Quarters of the Immortal Ate  
of the K. K. K. Gloomy Month. Bloody  
Moon. Black Night. Last hour.

General Orders No. 3.

Shrouded Brotherhood! Murdered Heroes!

Fling the bloody dirt that covers you to the four winds!  
Erect thy Goddess on the banks of the Avernus. Mark well  
your foes! Strike with the redhot spear! Prepare Charon  
for his task!

Enemies reform! The skies shall be blackened! A  
single Star shall look down upon horrible deeds! The  
night owl shall hoot a requiem o'er Ghostly Corpses!

Beware! Beware! Beware!

The Great Cyclops is angry! Hobgoblins report! Shears  
and lash!

Tar and Feathers! Hell and Fury!

Revenge! Revenge! Revenge!

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 366;  
Lester and Wilson, KKK, 192.





Bad men! white, black, yellow, repent!

The hour is at hand! Be ye ready! Life is short! J.

H. S. Y. W!

Ghosts! Ghosts! Ghosts!

Drink thy tea made of distilled hell, stirred with  
the lightning of heaven, and sweetened with the gall of  
thine enemies!

All will be well!!!

By order of the Great

Blufustin.

G. S.

K. L. K.

A true copy - Peterloo."

Here is another similar notice written by the same author,  
and published in the same paper in March, 1868:<sup>1</sup>

"Serpent's Den - Death's Retreat.

Hollow Tomb - Misery Cave of the

Great Immortal Order, No. 1000.

Windy Month-- Bloody Moon,

Muddy Night - Twelfth Hour.

General Orders No.1..

Make Ready! Make Ready! Make Ready!

The mighty hobgoblins of the Conf. dead in Hell-a-Bulloo assembled!

Revenge! Revenge!

Be secret, be cautious, be terrible!

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 190.



By special grant, Hell freezes over for your passage. Offended  
ghosts, put on your skates and cross over to Mother earth!

Work! Work!! Work!!!

Double, double, toil and trouble;

Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

Ye white men who stick to black, soulless beasts! the time arrives  
for you to part. Q. W. X. W. V. Y., and so, from Omega to Alpha.

Cool it with a baboon's blood

Then the charm is firm and good.

Ye niggers who stick to low whites!

Begone, Begone, Begone! The world turns around, - the thirteenth  
hour approacheth!

The handwriting on the wall warns you!

From the murderer's gibbet, throw

Into the flame. Come high and low.

By order of the Great

Blufustin.

A true copy - Peterloo.

G. S.

K.K.K."

It will be noted that the headings of the two preceding  
documents were written in cipher, and served to notify members  
of special meetings of the Klan.<sup>1</sup> The following instrument, how-  
ever, taken from the Union Weekly Times of Union County, South  
Carolina, is a warning pure and simple, and strikes straight out  
from the shoulder in plain and forceful Anglo-Saxon:<sup>2</sup>

1. See explanation of cipher in Chapter VII.

2. Ku Klux Reports, South Carolina Testimony, 1096.



"Headquarters: Ninth Division, S. C.

Special Orders No. 3, K. K. K.

'Ignorance is the curse of God.' For this reason we are determined that the members of the legislature, the school commissioners, and the county commissioners of Union, shall no longer officiate. Fifteen (15) days' notice from this date is therefore given and if they, one and all, do not at once and forever resign their present inhuman, disgraceful, and outrageous rule, then retributive justice will as surely be used as night follows day.

"Also, 'An honest man is the noblest work of God'. For this reason, if the clerk of the said board of county commissioners and school commissioners does not immediately renounce and relinquish his present position, then harsher measures than these will most assuredly and certainly be used.

A. O. -- Grand Secretary."

The more vulgar and more violent type of warning is well illustrated by the following example:<sup>1</sup>

"Damn Your Soul. The Horrible Sepulchre and Bloody Moon has at last arrived. Some live today tomorrow 'Die.' We the undersigned understand thru our Grand 'Cyclops' that you have recommended a big black Nigger for Male agent on our nu rode; wel, sir, Jest you understand in time if he gets on the rode you can make up your mind to pull roape. If you have anything to say in regard to the Matter, meet the Grand Cyclops and Conclave at Den No. 4 at 12 o'clock midnight, Oct 1st, 1871.

"When you are in Celera we warn you to hold your

1. Ku Klux Reports, Ala. Test., 1054.



tongue and not speak so much with your mouth or otherwise you will be taken on surprise and led out by the Klan and learnt to stretch hemp. Beware, Beware, Beware.

(Signed)

"Phillip Isenbaum, Grand Cyclops.

"John Bankstown.

"You know who. And all

"Esaw Dawes.

others."

"Marcus Thomas.

"Bloody Bones."

Still another type of warning was sent to several students at the University of Alabama who were suspected of being Radical Republicans. The following letter, together with three other similar ones, was tied to a dagger which was stuck into the door of one of the university buildings:<sup>1</sup>

"Devid Smith: You have received one notice from us, and this shall be our last. You nor no other d--d son of a d--d radical traitor shall stay at our university. Leave here in less than ten days, for in that time we will visit the place and it will not be well for you to be found out there. The State is ours and so shall our University be."<sup>2</sup>

Whenever these warnings were not heeded, the Klansmen did not scruple to adopt forcible methods of persuasion. The predominant practice was that of whipping. The thirteen bulky volumes of the Ku Klux Reports are taken up in large part by a recital of case after case of the whipping of both negroes and white persons by bands of masked men in Ku Klux disguises under monotonously

1. Ku Klux Reports, Ala. Test., 418.

2. Ibid, 418.





similar circumstances.<sup>1</sup> The usual, typical form of procedure consisted of a band of twenty or thirty men going out and whipping from two or three to twelve or fourteen persons in a single night. Most of those so chastised were negroes, though now and then a white person was included. The negroes were pulled out of bed, forced to strip completely and to kneel or lie down while several of the disguised men administered from thirty to fifty or more lashes with a whip or small club.<sup>2</sup> Blood was usually drawn, though seldom was the beating severe enough to inflict any permanent or serious injuries.<sup>3</sup> In many instances women, as well as men, were so treated.<sup>4</sup> The offenders were in most cases told of the nature of their iniquities, and compelled to promise to mend their conduct in the future,<sup>5</sup> under pain of another visitation by the regulators. A great deal of profanity was used and many vile epithets employed in connection with many of these affairs.<sup>6</sup> Negro preachers and school-teachers who were suspected of inciting their clientele by revolutionary teachings of social equality and equal racial privileges were handled in an especially rough manner.<sup>7</sup> Very often, too, white school-teachers, carpet-baggers, and scoldwags were likewise subjected to a whipping.<sup>8</sup>

In some cases a more violent measure than that of whipping was employed. This occurred, however, only when the offense for which the victim was to be punished had been particularly heinous,

1. See Klu Klux Reports, especially Volumes III-VIII.
2. Ku Klux Reports, Miss. Test., 225, 228.
3. Ibid, 238, 226.
4. Ibid, 225.
5. Ibid, 234.
6. Ku Klux Reports, Ala. Test., 149.
7. Ku Klux Reports, Miss. Test., 225.
8. Ku Klux Reports, Ala. Test., 417.



or when the offender attempted to resist and forced the Klansmen to shoot or strike partially in self-defense.<sup>1</sup> Thus a number of men were shot or hung, and others were so badly beaten or wounded that they died within a short time from the effects of their injuries.<sup>2</sup> However, these were practically always exceptional instances, and formed only a very small minority of the total number of cases which came up for consideration. In practically every instance in which a man was deliberately and intentionally killed by genuine members of the Klan, it was done as an act of retributive justice for some heinous and atrocious offense, usually either murder or the rape of a white woman.<sup>3</sup> In considering any misdeed of this kind, the members of a Den were all assembled in regular meeting and a court appointed which observed all the forms of a court-martial.<sup>4</sup> If the evidence showed that the accused was guilty, the death sentence was passed much as in an ordinary court of justice; if his guilt could not be established, he was acquitted.<sup>5</sup> Although we cannot wholly justify the action of the Klan in thus taking the law into its own hands, still the venal, corrupt, and prejudiced administration of justice under the carpet-bag governments<sup>6</sup> of that day goes far to excuse their conduct.

It should be borne in mind, also, in this connection, that many of the most atrocious so-called "Ku Klux outrages" were com-

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 107.
2. Ku Klux Reports, South Carolina Test., 1474-1479; Miss. Test., 224.
3. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 106, 167.
4. Ibid, 167.
5. Ibid, 168.
6. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 43.



mitted during the years 1869, 1870, and 1871, after the Klan had been formally disbanded, by men who had never had any connection with the Klan, yet who made use of its disguises in carrying out their own criminal plans.<sup>1</sup> Even before the disbandment of the Klan, too, many lawless spirits copied the costumes of the order and used them to cover up their own misdeeds.<sup>2</sup> The extent of this practice may be seen from this positive statement by Maj. Crowe, one of the six original founders of the society, "No single instance has ever occurred of the arrest of a masked man who proved to be - when stripped of his disguises - a real Ku Klux."<sup>3</sup> The Klan itself was, beyond any doubt, guilty of much unnecessary cruelty and barbarity. It was impossible to keep out a certain number of members of low morals and brutal instincts; and to such men the opportunity to indulge in brutality, afforded by the secrecy and disguises of the order, was too tempting to be neglected. Yet it is highly unjust, and utterly unwarranted by the actual facts, - insofar as these can be ascertained, - to hold the Klan responsible for all the outrages that were committed under its disguises. The majority of the members of the order were actuated by conscientious and upright motives, and honestly believed their harsh measures to be justified by the necessity of the times. But whether justified or not, certain it is that no milder policy would have made any impression upon the disordered and chaotic society of that day.

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 106.
2. Wilson, KKK, Cent. Mag., VI, 407.
3. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 106.



## CHAPTER IX

## Decline and Demise of the Klan

During the late summer and early autumn of 1868 the Klan underwent a second great transformation. Within this comparatively brief space of time it was changed from a band of honest, upright, law-respecting regulators, representing the best classes of the community, and conscientiously attempting to ameliorate the evils of contemporary society, to a more heterogeneous group of men of mixed morals and purposes, writhing under atrocious charges only partially justified, and desperately seeking to avert the mortal antagonism of a hostile and belligerent administration and a misguided public opinion. While before the Klansmen had aggressively taken the offensive, they were now frantically on the defensive, and sought only to maintain their homes, their liberty, and their lives.

The causes of this metamorphosis were various, and may be traced, as in the case of practically everything in any way connected with the Klan, to the anomalous and disturbed conditions of the times. In the first place, many bad and undesirable men, who used the costumes of the Klan simply as a cloak for their own misdeeds, had been admitted into the order.<sup>1</sup> With an organization of such a size and character, this was practically unavoidable; and yet these selfish and unscrupulous members, who were thoroughly out of sympathy with the real objects of the society, caused

1. Wilson, KKK, Cent. Mag., VI, 407.





much trouble and aggravation for the more conscientious Klansmen. Besides these enemies within its own ranks, an increasingly large number of outsiders aped the methods and copied the disguises of the Klan, and by their notorious exploits brought down upon the society a perfect torrent of unwarranted censure.<sup>1</sup> Many of the more respectable Klansmen became disgusted with the degeneration and misrepresentation of the society and resigned their membership. The very element of secrecy, which had been such a bulwark of strength, now became a source of weakness. The identical disguises which enabled the Klan to deceive outsiders also made it possible for outsiders, with perfect reciprocity, to deceive the Klan itself. Individual members could perform deeds which were not sanctioned by the society as a whole. It was impossible to ascertain, in many cases, whether a certain act had been performed by members with the sanction of their Den, or whether a member or members had done it without any official recognition, or whether a total outsider had committed the deed.

But whatever the nature or circumstances of the act, the Klan was given full and unreserved credit for every outrage of any sort. It mattered not under which of the above three categories any particular misdeed chanced to fall, it was always charged to the official sanction of the Klan.<sup>5</sup> Yet because of their policy of absolute secrecy and their oath to divulge nothing in any way connected with the order,<sup>4</sup> the members could not explain their

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 101.
2. *Ibid*, 101.
3. Wilson, KKK, Cent. Mag., VI, 407.
4. See copy of oath reproduced in Chapter VII above.



real position or defend themselves against these unjust charges. They believed their objects to be essentially good and their methods justified, at least in the great majority of cases; and they chafed at being so cruelly misunderstood, and at being forced to maintain an utter silence which seemed to give a tacit acquiescence in the undeserved charges which were hurled against them. Added to this was the bitter knowledge, on the other hand, that some of their own number had been false to the ideals of the order, and that a few of the charges of crimes committed by members for petty personal revenge were undeniably true.

Out of this policy of mystery and secrecy and silence grew a popular misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the character and purposes of the order. People obtained an intangible impression that the Klan was meditating some terrible measures of crime and extermination, and gave way to an unreasoning fear of the society which was only enhanced by their utter ignorance of its real purposes and the general indefiniteness and vagueness of the whole situation.<sup>1</sup> They obtained no positive assurances of any kind from the order, but instead met only a sphinx-like, enigmatic silence; and so, following the universal bent of human nature, which is always suspicious of the secret and the mysterious, they imputed to the Klansmen the worst possible motives which their fertile imaginations could devise. And yet, curiously enough, side by side with this growing fear of the motives of the order was a decreasing alarm at its methods. The common populace had at last become convinced that there was nothing of the supernatural

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 107.



in the practices of the Klan, and that behind the grotesque disguises were only human beings like themselves.<sup>1</sup> Therefore the effectiveness of the former tricks and methods of secrecy and mystery was greatly reduced, and much more stringent measures were necessary in order to produce the desired results. Even the negroes so far overcame their terror at the sight of a Klansman that many of them donned a costume and used it as a disguise on their foraging expeditions.<sup>2</sup> How large numbers of whites outside the order also adopted this practice has already been described.<sup>3</sup> It is a significant fact that of a large number of persons arrested in Tennessee for wearing Ku Klux disguises, the majority were negroes, and the remainder were whites totally unconnected with the order.<sup>4</sup> Not a single genuine member was so arrested.<sup>5</sup> The Klansmen, besides resenting bitterly such copying of their disguises by the very persons whose conduct they were attempting to regulate, felt that it was due to themselves, to society, and to the government that they afford the lawless element of the community no such facilities for the commission of crime with impunity; and therefore they acted with great severity against those caught violating their rules.<sup>6</sup>

The general public, however, because of the silence still maintained by the Klan, did not understand the perfectly justifiable reason which lay behind these severities, and imagined that perhaps this was the beginning of the terrible holocaust of death

1. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 104.
2. *Ibid*, 105.
3. See preceding chapter.
4. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 106.
5. *Ibid*, 106.
6. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 106.



and destruction concerning which no one had any definite information, but which everyone feared. Therefore, people began to prepare themselves in a vague and uncertain manner for the conflict which they felt was approaching. The negroes, in particular, joined by a few whites, began to form companies and to drill at night, with the purpose of defending themselves against the fancied onslaughts of the Ku Klux.<sup>1</sup> A growing feeling of antagonism and hostility between the two parties soon became very marked. Restraint became more and more difficult, and on each side harsh and cruel crimes and outrages were committed.<sup>2</sup> The Ku Klux members, honestly attempting to uphold the morals of the community, and really intending harm to no innocent person, as they believed, were sullen and aggrieved because acts which they had not committed and motives that they did not entertain were imputed to them; while the members of the opposition party, composed of negroes and most of the whites not connected with the order, believed themselves to be acting in the strictest self-defense against the vague yet awful ordeals which they felt sure the Klan was preparing for them. Thus by the autumn of 1868 a condition of affairs approaching that of civil war existed in many localities.

By this time the Klansmen had finally reached the conclusion that their policy of absolute secrecy could no longer be strictly maintained, and that they should at least attempt to justify their position in the eyes of the public. Therefore, early in September, 1868, the Grand Dragon of the Realm of Tennessee

1. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 108.
2. *Ibid.*, 108.
3. Wilson, *KKK*, Cent. Reg., VI, 407.





issued a general order in which he set forth the most important principles and objects of the Klan.<sup>1</sup> Some of the more striking extracts from this order read as follows: "This Klan is not an institution of violence, lawlessness, and cruelty; it is not lawless; it is not aggressive; it is not military; it is not revolutionary. It is essentially, originally, and inherently a protective organization. It proposes to execute law instead of resisting it. --- This Klan is not a political party; it is not a military party. --- We are striving to protect all good, peaceful, well-disposed and law-abiding men, whether white or black."<sup>2</sup>

But matters had reached such a state by this time that few persons paid any attention to this statement; and by those who did it was regarded purely as an attempt to appease the general wrath.<sup>3</sup> Public opinion demanded drastic action against the Klan. Therefore, in September, 1868, Governor Brownlow of Tennessee called the Legislature of that state into special session for the purpose of attempting to cope with the situation.<sup>4</sup> After a very brief session and little discussion, an Anti-Ku Klux Statute was passed, many provisions of which were almost tyrannical in their nature.<sup>5</sup> This was followed during the ensuing months by similar statutes passed by other state legislatures;<sup>6</sup> but since this law in Tennessee was the first one to be passed, since it was fairly typical of all the others, and since it was this bill

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 109.

2. Ibid, 109.

3. Ibid, 110.

4. Ibid, 113.

5. Ibid, 113.

6. Ibid, 114;

Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 375.



which led directly to the final disbandment of the Klan, we shall examine only this one act.

In reading the exceedingly harsh and severe provisions of this statute, one is almost reminded of the old Albigensian persecutions, or the cruelly rigorous legislation passed against the Jews in many mediaeval countries. It was provided that if any person should unite with, associate with, promote or encourage any secret organization of persons who prowled through the country or towns, by night or day, disguised or otherwise, he should on conviction be fined not less than five hundred dollars and sentenced to not less than five years in prison. If any person voluntarily informed on anyone guilty of violating any of the provisions of this act, he was to receive as a reward one-half of the fine imposed; while if such an informer were himself guilty of any of the provisions of the act, he was to be protected from any prosecution whatever. Any inhabitant of the state was fully authorized to arrest anyone whom he believed to be guilty under the provisions of this act without process, in any county of Tennessee. Any person feeding, lodging, entertaining, or concealing an offender against this law was to be subject to the same penalties as the actual offender. Any person making, or causing to be made, or having in his possession any uniform or regalia was to be fined at the discretion of the court; and it was made lawful for anyone assailed at night by a disguised person to kill his assailant. Newspapers were forbidden to publish anything coming from or pertaining to the Klan. This law was made to apply to all offenses mentioned in it which had been committed before its



passage; and it was provided that any court trying any case under this act might grant "as many new trials as may be necessary to attain the end of justice."<sup>1</sup> It will readily be seen that since this law applied to all offenses committed before its passage it was really an ex post facto measure, and therefore unconstitutional; that it enabled any guilty person to escape all punishment by the despicable method of turning informer; and that it contained the unprecedented provision of making every inhabitant of the state an officer extraordinary, with full power to arrest without process, on mere suspicion. . . What a magnificent opportunity this last clause provided for the satisfaction of petty personal spite and grudges may be readily imagined.

The same Legislature also authorized the Governor to organize, equip, and call into active service an armed volunteer force to be known as the Tennessee State Guards.<sup>2</sup> Upon the representation of ten Union Republican men, or three justices of the peace, residing in any county of the state, that armed forces were needed to maintain order, the Governor might declare martial law in such counties and send the volunteer troops there to enforce the law.<sup>3</sup> The expenses of these troops were to be collected from the counties upon which they were quartered.<sup>4</sup>

The passage of these harsh and tyrannical measures precipitated a perfect reign of terror. The members of the Klan were forced into the attitude of men fighting for life and liberty.

1. See Lester and Wilson, KKK, 114-123, for text of this act.
2. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 123.
3. Ibid, 123.
4. Ibid, 124.



Thousands of them had never in their lives been lawbreakers; yet now their mere membership in the order, which had been perfectly lawful when they joined, was made a penal offense. For this alone, regardless of any illegal acts which they had or had not committed, they were made liable to fine and imprisonment, were exposed to arrest without process by any malicious negro or meddling white man, and were denied even the privilege of obtaining a meal or a night's lodging away from home. They were practically outlawed; and like an animal driven to bay, they turned and made one last frantic effort to defend themselves against their oppressors. With a rashness and an abandon born of desperation, they committed many excesses; the negroes, Union whites, and volunteer troops replied in kind; and for a certain period during the early winter of 1869 a practical state of warfare existed.<sup>1</sup> It was said that hundreds of people slept in the woods for weeks at a time in order to escape a night visit from the raiders of either side.<sup>2</sup> Whippings, robberies, and shooting affrays were daily occurrences; business was paralyzed; industry was at a standstill; and all the ordinary affairs of life were subordinated to the exigencies of this absorbing struggle.<sup>3</sup>

It was under such conditions as these that the Grand Wizard, General N. B. Forrest, in pursuance of his power as the chief executive "to determine finally all questions of paramount importance to the interests of the order",<sup>4</sup> at length decided to

1. Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 125.
2. *Ku Klux Reports*, I, 35.
3. *Ibid*, 30-38;  
Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 125-127.
4. Text of Prescript, Lester and Wilson, *KKK*, 166.





disband the Klan.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, late in February, 1869,<sup>2</sup> he issued a proclamation addressed to all Realms, Dominions, Provinces, and Dens in the Empire, calling upon all members of the Klan to disband.<sup>3</sup> In this document the Grand Wizard gave a brief outline of the severe legislation which had been directed against the Klan, and pointed out the tremendous dangers and difficulties involved in maintaining an organized existence. He contended that the order had now in a large measure accomplished the main objects of its existence. At a critical and chaotic time, when all other agencies for the protection of life and property had failed, the Klan had afforded such protection to many families; but some members had disobeyed orders and a number of outsiders had presumed to perform acts for which the society was not responsible, but which it was unjustly accused of encouraging. This had caused misunderstanding, misrepresentation, censure, and opposition. Therefore, since the order had largely accomplished the ends for which it had been organized, and since its continued existence involved such great dangers and difficulties, it was deemed best to disband. The members were directed to burn or otherwise destroy all regalia and paraphernalia of every description, and all documents in any way connected with the society; and they were commanded to desist from all further assemblies or acts as Ku Klux. However, they were counseled to assist, in their private capacities, in maintaining peace and order in the future.<sup>4</sup>

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 128.

2. The exact date is unknown; but it was sometime between February 20 and March 1.

3. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 128.

4. See Lester and Wilson, KKK, 128-130, for contents of this proclamation.



This proclamation, then, terminated the official and organized existence of the Klan. Owing to the poor facilities for communication, the great extent of the Empire, and the fact that the newspapers were forbidden to publish Ku Klux notices, a few outlying Dens never received a copy of the order, and continued to maintain an isolated and precarious existence for some time longer.<sup>1</sup> But in the great majority of instances the command was duly received, and was promptly and implicitly obeyed.<sup>2</sup> All documents were burned, and all disguises, costumes, and other paraphernalia scrupulously destroyed.<sup>3</sup> There were many weird and impressive scenes as the members assembled for the last time in their secret meeting-places, donned again their awe-inspiring costumes, recited once more their mystic ritual, and then consigned both ritual and costumes to the flames. In the sadder light of the dying embers of the last relics of their disbanded organization, they pronounced its name aloud for the last time, shook hands in silence, and slowly started homeward. A graphic description of the disbandment of the den at Nashville, Tennessee, is given by a member who took part in the ceremony. "In Nashville, just before the disbandment, the Klansmen, in full Ku Klux regalia, paraded through the streets, and although the Capitol was in charge of three thousand Reconstruction militia, and two hundred police, who were sworn to take every Ku Klux dead or alive, the boldness of the society so dumbfounded the police, that the silent horsemen rode through the lines without being molested. Straight up

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 130.

2. Ibid, 130.

3. Ibid, 130.



Capitol Hill they marched and then down again, not a word was spoken, and once outside the city they entered the shadows of the forest. Down its dim aisles, lit by threads of moonbeams, the horsemen slowly wound their way to the appointed place. For the last time the Chaplain led in prayer, the men disrobed, drew from each horse his white mantle, opened a grave and solemnly buried their regalia, sprinkling the folds with the ashes of their burned ritual. In this weird ceremony ended the most remarkable Revolution, in many respects, in history. The Ku Klux Klan was born in mystery, lived in mystery, and mystery will ever shroud its grave."<sup>1</sup>

Thus ends the story of the Ku Klux Klan. In the actions and conduct of this strange and cabalistic society there is much to condemn and more to regret; but he who obtains a full understanding of the anomalous situation, social, civil, and political, which called it forth, will also find much to awaken sympathy and even a little to call forth admiration.

1. Rose, KKK, or Invisible Empire, 71.



## CHAPTER X

## Continuance of the Movement After the Disbandment

But though the Klan itself was now disbanded, this fact did not by any means lead to an immediate cessation of all violence and disturbance. The Ku Klux Klan was only one, though the greatest and most widely known, of a large number of similar organizations. The activities of all these regulative societies taken together came to be designated by the generic term, Ku Klux Movement.<sup>1</sup> But the members of the Klan itself comprised only about one-half of the total membership of all these allied organizations;<sup>2</sup> and since the latter were unaffected by the order of disbandment, they continued their former practices as usual, with only small abatement.

Practically all of these societies were patterned very closely after the Ku Klux Klan in purpose, method, and practices. They all wished to drive out the carpet-bagger and the scalawag, to keep the negro in his place, and to secure the domination of the whites in the affairs of the South; and they all sought to bring about such a condition by means of a combination of mystery, secrecy, and violence. They differed greatly in minor details; but in all large and essential things they were unanimously agreed. Probably the largest and most influential of these organizations, outside of the Klan itself, was that known as the Knights of the White Camelia, which was especially powerful in the Black Belt of

1. Fleming, *Civil War and Recon. in Ala.*, 674.

2. Brown, *Lower South in Amer. Hist.*, 208.





southern Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. This order was first organized in New Orleans, on May 23, 1867,<sup>1</sup> and soon began to spread with remarkable rapidity. In June, 1868, a convention was held in New Orleans, and a centralized administrative system, including a Grand Council and several Subordinate or District Councils, adopted.<sup>2</sup> The discipline was strict and good order was rigidly maintained. The fundamental tenet of the members of the society was the supreme importance of the maintenance of the superiority of the white race, which they proved, at least to their own satisfaction, by historical and physiological evidence. Every initiate was forced to promise never to marry any except a white woman, never to vote for any except a white man, to protect all whites against the encroachments of the blacks, to oppose any sign of social equality and intermarriage between the races, and to "observe a marked distinction between the races in public and private life." However, he was also required to respect and protect the blacks in their just and lawful privileges and rights. Like the Klan, it was a secret, night-riding order.<sup>3</sup> Other similar organizations, all very much smaller, yet much alike in their purposes and methods, were the Constitutional Union Guards, The Sons of '76, The '76 Association, Pale Faces, White Boys, White Brotherhood, Regulators, White League, White Rose, Lost Clan of Cocletz, Knights of the Golden Circle, Centaurs of Caucasian Civilization, and Angels of Avenging Justice.<sup>4</sup>

1. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 669.

2. Ibid., 669.

3. See Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 349-354, for constitution and ritual of this order.

4. Fleming, Civil War and Recon. in Ala., 673.



During the years 1869, 1870, and 1871 these various societies still continued to cause a great amount of disturbance and violence.<sup>1</sup> All the evils which had attended the latter days of the Ku Klux Klan were fully duplicated, and in some cases even advanced to more serious proportions. The various state legislatures passed measure after measure in a vain effort to remedy conditions; but with the weak and inconsiderable resources at their disposal, they were powerless to cope with the situation effectually.<sup>2</sup> Finally the national government came to the assistance of the states, although it must be confessed that the Congressional leaders who brought about this assistance were interested not so much in ameliorating the disturbed conditions in the South as in using the so-called Ku Klux outrages as an excuse for obtaining control of the Southern elections. With this double object in view, however, they passed the three Enforcement Acts. The first two of these, passed on May 13, 1870, and February 28, 1871, respectively, were intended primarily, though not ostensibly, to give the Radical party in the South control over elections, and dealt mainly with methods of voting, the franchise, eligibility requirements, registration, election supervisors, and closely allied subjects.<sup>3</sup> There was no specific reference to the Ku Klux Movement, and therefore these two acts need not concern us further.

In the third Enforcement Act, however, passed on April 20, 1871, and known also as the Ku Klux Act, a serious effort was made to correct the current evils caused partially by the secret

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 131.

2. Ibid., 124.

3. McDonald, Select Statutes of U. S. Hist., 1861-1898, 247, 249; McPherson, Hist. of Recon., 546-550.



societies. The President was authorized to declare the Southern States in a state of rebellion, to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, and to employ the land and naval forces of the United States, whenever and wherever he became convinced that a condition of insurrection, domestic violence, and unlawful conspiracy existed. It was forbidden to hinder the execution of the laws of the United States, to prevent anyone from accepting or holding office, to drive away any official or witness, and to appear in disguise on a public highway or on another's premises. Cases of conspiracy and of violence committed in disguise were to be tried in the federal courts; and the federal judges were empowered to exclude from the jury anyone suspected of being connected with any secret society.<sup>1</sup>

The provisions of this act, coming at a time when the work of the secret orders was almost completed, when there was no longer any urgent or logical need for their existence, and when the influential whites of the South were just beginning to re-obtain control of affairs, dealt a death-blow to the whole Ku Klux Movement. Prosecutions soon began on a large scale. Up to April 10, 1872, four hundred and ninety persons were indicted under this act in Mississippi alone, of whom one hundred and seventy-two were arrested and bound over, twenty-eight pleaded guilty, and fourteen confessed and turned state's evidence.<sup>2</sup> Before October 17, 1871, eighteen hundred arrests had been made in all parts of the South.<sup>3</sup> In South Carolina President Grant suspended

1. See McDonald, *Select Statutes of U. S. Hist.*, 1861-1898, 262; McPherson, *Handbook of Politics for 1872*, 85, for provisions of this act.

2. Garner, *Reason. in Miss.*, 352.

3. Fleming, *Doc. Hist. of Recon.*, II, 150.



the writ of habeas corpus for several weeks in nine counties.<sup>1</sup> In North Carolina Governor Holden appointed a man of high influence in each county who worked quietly amongst the members of the secret societies and persuaded them to disband.<sup>2</sup> In all other states arrests were also made and stringent measures taken to force the various organizations to disband.

The growing danger of prosecution, the accomplishment of many things which they had set out to do, the uselessness of further organized existence, the increasing desire for peaceful and normal conditions, the gradual attainment of the control of affairs by the influential white element of the South, -- all these things combined to sound the knell of the Ku Klux Movement. The secret, mysterious, night-riding societies had completed their share of the work; the remainder of the battle for supremacy was to be fought out in the open. And so by the end of the year 1873 practically all of the secret societies had been disbanded, the long list of acts of violence and mystery and terror had been brought to a close, and the South of the Reconstruction was rapidly fading away into the thin substance of which memories are made.

1. Fleming, Doc. Hist. of Recon., II, 128.
2. Publications of Historical Society of Trinity College, Series. III, 120.





## CHAPTER XI

## The Klan's Place in History

Such is the story of the Ku Klux Klan, from its humble origin to the final disbandment and the ensuing overthrow of the whole allied movement. Having considered the purposes, methods, and acts of the order, what place in history shall we accord it? Under what heading shall its name be indexed in the great classificatory catalogue of the world's history? In what niche of the Statuary Hall of important historical organizations shall we erect its monument?

The appraisal of the exact position to be occupied by the Klan is, and must ever remain, a matter of dispute. There are still the diametrically opposed opinions and judgments, softened and blurred by time, yet still existent, of the Northerner and the Southerner. To the former the name Ku Klux signified conspiracy, outlawry, and tomfoolery, the stultification of the Federal Government, and the practical nullification of the Emancipation Proclamation; while to the latter the Klan represented the overthrow of a tyrannical oppression and the reassertion of many of the great principles of the American Revolution. To one the Klansman was a conspirator and a criminal; to the other he was a hero and a liberator. This radical difference of opinion is well illustrated in the methods and report of the Joint Congressional Committee which investigated conditions throughout the Southern States in 1871 and 1872. The majority of the com-



mittee took the attitude of prosecuting attorneys dealing with desperate criminals, obtained much hearsay, partisan, and exaggerated evidence, and brought in a report which was violently denunciatory;<sup>1</sup> while the minority assumed the position that an indictment could not be brought against a whole people, softened the evidence and palliated the offenses as far as possible, and concluded that the movement had not been without many admirable and justifiable features.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of these differences of opinion, however, it is possible to arrive at certain incontrovertible conclusions with regard to the Ku Klux movement. In the first place, it was not the mere scheme or contrivance of any single man or of any single set of men. It was not confined to any isolated section of the South or to any particular clique or group of people. Instead, it represented the feelings and expressed the will of a whole people. Of this there can be no doubt. The movement was so widespread and spontaneous that we are forced to regard it as a true historical development, arising naturally out of the disturbed and anomalous situation which attended its birth. In the second place, it was ingenious, and represented practically the only form of resistance which under the circumstances would have been possible and successful. The Southern whites had tried open secession, and had been defeated. Then they had attempted to cope with the situation by means of legislation, in the form of the so-called Black Codes; and Congress interfered and undid their work. But

1. See the Majority report in Vol. I of the Ku Klux Reports.
2. See the Minority report in Vol. I of the Ku Klux Reports.



they found the Congressional plan to be irritating, unwise, oppressive, and utterly impossible. To men of their pride and honor the situation was unendurable, and they resolved to resist. But what form should their resistance take? It could not be open warfare, for they had promised to forego the right of secession, and, besides, their resources were utterly wasted. It could not be through the ballot-box, for most of them were disfranchised. Therefore, they resolved to bring about a secret revolution. The methods of the Ku Klux Klan, organized merely for boyish sport, fitted their purpose admirably, and they made the Klan the agent of their secret resistance. William Garrott Brown, in his interesting work, "The Lower South in American History," compares this secret revolution to the deathbed stratagem of Cardinal Richelieu, who, when his enemies became too powerful to be resisted openly, took to his bed and feigned death, muttering to himself,

"The lion's skin's too short to-night, -  
Now for the fox's."<sup>1</sup>

In the next place, this movement was highly unique. It arose out of a situation which was unexampled; and, as in the case of its environment, we may search the pages of history in vain for its counterpart or a close parallel. Various historical analogies have been suggested, such as the Carbonari of Italy, the Tugendbund of Germany, the Nihilists of Russia, the Young Turks, and the Confreries of mediaeval France.<sup>2</sup> But beyond the common element of secrecy, the analogy between any of these revolutionary

1. Brown, Lower South in Amer. Hist., 191.
2. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 25.



societies and the Ku Klux Klan is far more apparent than real. And finally, the movement was successful in accomplishing the things which it set out to perform. It destroyed the Reconstructionist reign of corruption and injustice, drove the carpet-bagger and the scoundrel out of office, forced the negro back into what was regarded as his proper plane, and restored the supremacy of the old white aristocracy of the South. Certainly no open revolt could have succeeded more completely.

There still remain two highly controversial questions in connection with the Klan. When one inquires, "Was it necessary?" the answer must be that no other plan would have served so well, if, indeed, a project of any other nature could have been employed at all. But when one comes to the question, "Was it justifiable?" the answer is far more difficult. Certainly we cannot defend or condone all the excesses which many members of the Klan committed; yet when we picture to ourselves the trying conditions under which these men lived, when we realize fully the serious nature of their provocation, and when we recall the essentially honest and upright character of the society as a whole and the conscientious conduct of the great majority of the genuine members, we cannot find it in our hearts to censure too severely these occasional lapses from moderation. If the offense was great, the provocation was fully commensurate. Although we are not ready to declare that the end justified the means, we are forced to conclude that "never before was an end so clearly worth fighting for made so clearly unattainable by any purely good means."<sup>1</sup> And we are led to wonder

1. Brown, Lower South in Amer. Hist., 224.





whether, if an unkind Providence had caused us to reside in the South of the Reconstruction days, we, too, would not have been members of the Ku Klux Klan.

What, then, shall be our final verdict concerning the character and nature of this highly unique and much-maligned organization? Perhaps no one is more competent to bring in such a verdict than Captain J. C. Lester, one of the original founders of the order. And many years after the final disbandment he penned the following epitaph for the Klan:<sup>1</sup>

"Thus lived, so died, this strange order. Its birth was an accident; its growth was a comedy; its death a tragedy. It owed its existence wholly to the anomalous condition of social and civil affairs in the South immediately succeeding the unfortunate contest in which so many brave men in blue and grey fell, martyrs to their convictions. There never was, before or since, a period of our history when such an order could have lived. May there never be again!"

1. Lester and Wilson, KKK, 132.



## Bibliography

Only those references are given which have been actually used in the preparation of this thesis. For the sake of brevity, it has been found advisable to abbreviate some of the references when given in the foot-notes; and in every such case, the abbreviated form is found indented just under the full reference as given in this list.

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